Race and Nationality in the Work of James Leslie Mitchell/ Lewis Grassic Gibbon

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Contents:

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List of Abbreviations used in page references and notes:

JLM James Leslie Mitchell
LGG Lewis Grassic Gibbon

CC The Calends of Cairo
CH Cloud Howe
CoM The Conquest of the Maya
GG Grey Granite
GH Gay Hunter
H Hanno
LT The Lost Trumpet
N Niger
NAU Nine Against the Unknown
PDEN Persian Dawns, Egyptian Nights
ScSc Scottish Scene
SH A Scots Hairst
SoM The Speak of the Mearns
Sp Spartacus
SR Stained Radiance
SS Sunset Song
TD The Thirteenth Disciple
TGB Three Go Back

AUL Aberdeen University Library
EUL Edinburgh University Library
IUL University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library
NLS National Library of Scotland

N.B. in quotations dots without brackets . . . are part of the original material; dots with brackets [. . .] indicate my own elision of words.

Abstract

This thesis covers Lewis Grassic Gibbon/ James Leslie Mitchell's treatment of race in its cultural, national, and biological forms. It begins with Mitchell's idiosyncratic views on the nature of history and civilisation, which cut across race issues at several key points. Studying history involves noting the elimination or disappearance of certain races; modern civilisation classifies races more cold-bloodedly and dangerously than ever before; its present violent state suggests the possible end to all life on the planet (ch.1). It moves on to Mitchell's presentation, either negative or nostalgic, of his native Scotland (ch.2) and the more positive stance on his adopted England (ch.3) before a more general survey of his highly provocative views on a number of races and nations elsewhere (ch.4). It then investigates his two-pronged presentation of humankind as a violent species-- this violence coming basically from the male-- yet also as a species naturally wholesome and good (ch.5). It finally identifies a wish in Mitchell, expressed through certain author-surrogates, to escape involvement with humankind, stand aloof, and watch it as if in a laboratory (ch.6). Chapters 3, 5 and 6 refer frequently to H.G. Wells's influences on Mitchell.

Mitchell is revealed as a rather less socio-politically progressive figure than he has generally been taken for, and a writer whose thoughts on race and culture require more careful interpretation than has been performed by Marxists of various shades.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own, unaided work.

Signed .....

Introduction

Lewis Grassic Gibbon has been called "probably the finest novelist Scotland has produced this century" by a newspaper of no less authority than The Independent on Sunday.[1] The occasion: a leading article a few months before the General Election of April 1992 arguing that the cause of Scottish nationalism had increased in credibility due to the accelerating sense among Scots that Westminster Government was necessarily a bad thing. Thus the Grassic Gibbon viewpoint (spelt out most strongly in his essays) that such nationalism was parochial and retrogressive "no longer applies". This is not to reflect badly on Gibbon; it merely asserts that times have changed. The article pays tribute to his greatest work, A Scots Quair, written between 1932 and 1934, a trilogy of Scottish life from 1911 to the book's present, covering country (in Sunset Song), town (Cloud Howe), and city (Grey Granite) alongside and through the Great War, General Strike, and Great Depression. The Independent's interest in Gibbon is only one of a number of signs of interest outside Scotland. The last decade has seen Ph.D.s written on him in French and German;[2] it has seen inclusion in Valentine Cunningham's monumental British Writers of the Thirties[3] and in Christopher Harvie's survey of British political fiction, The Centre of Things.[4] It has also witnessed new editions of A Scots Quair and a number of other novels, some long out of print.[5]

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1 The Independent on Sunday Leading Article, 2 Feb 1992, p.24.

2 Keith Dixon, "Crise et Idéologie dans l'oeuvre de Lewis Grassic Gibbon / James Leslie Mitchell" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Grenoble, 1983); Uwe Zagratzki, "Lewis Grassic Gibbon -- Angry Young Scotsman" (doctoral thesis, University of Osnabrück, 1990) published as Libertäre und Utopische Tendenzen in Erzählwerk James Leslie Mitchells/ Lewis Grassic Gibbons (Frankfurt, 1992). All subsequent Zagratzki references are to the published version.

3 Valentine Cunningham, British Writers of the Thirties (Oxford, 1988).

4 Christopher Harvie, The Centre of Things: Political Fiction in Britain from Disraeli to the Present (London, 1991).

5 The Thirteenth Disciple (Edinburgh, 1981; first published 1931); Spartacus

A recurring feature of the reprinted English novels is a rather clumsy-looking title-page, with "James Leslie Mitchell" as author's name (his real name) and then "Lewis Grassic Gibbon" in brackets (the famous pseudonym adopted for his writing in Scots). Though he has become known as "Gibbon", I will generally use "Mitchell" for the sake of consistency through the discussion of his work except when a particular context expressly demands otherwise.

James Leslie Mitchell was born in 1901 into a crofting family living near Aberdeen, at Hill of Segget, Auchterless. The family soon moved south to Arbuthnott in the Mearns, on which village he would base the fictional Kinraddie in Sunset Song. A precocious reader bored by farm work, he won a bursary to Mackie Academy at the age of thirteen, with possibilities of university ahead. He walked out of college about a year later, however, after an argument with the conservative and authoritarian Rector. Journalism followed; initially in Aberdeen and then in Glasgow, this latter spell ending in attempted suicide following dismissal for embezzlement. He joined the army in 1919, serving abroad in Mesopotamia, Iraq and Egypt; he left it in 1923, only to join the Air Force in the same year due to the unavailability of other work. Only in 1929 did he get out of another hated job, to take up writing as a professional career, settling in Welwyn Garden City near London with his wife Rebecca/ "Ray", the girl next door from Arbuthnott. Over the next five years he was to produce an enormous output of fiction and non-fiction.

The first full-length novel, Stained Radiance (1930), is in part autobiography and jumps locations between London, the Mearns, and Palestine. The book's keynote is an entertaining and corrosive cynicism, concerning in particular the social injustices of contemporary Britain and the disinclination of the mainstream political parties to do anything about them. It was, however, about this time that Mitchell first began to

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(Edinburgh, 1990; first published 1933, republished 1970); Gay Hunter (Edinburgh, 1990; first published 1934); Stained Radiance (Edinburgh, 1993; first published 1930). Page numbers of TD, Sp, GH will refer to most recent editions cited; SR's first edition will be used.

show interest in Diffusionism, the theory that a Golden Age once existed in which free, happy hunter-gatherers wandered the earth in relative peace with their neighbours until "civilisation", involving agriculture and a consequent religious and state tyranny, diffused from Egypt to envelop most of the world. Not every Diffusionist theorist believed that a return to such an anarchic state was possible or desirable;[6] Mitchell shows signs of believing in a return in some sense in The Thirteenth Disciple (1931) and Image and Superscription (1933), both about a young anti-establishment man's quest for spiritual and material truth. Equally trenchantly in favour of Diffusionist doctrine are Three Go Back (1932) and Gay Hunter (1934), both science-fiction time travel stories, both involving representatives of Mitchell's 1930s travelling twenty thousand years through time and meeting hunter-gatherers in a Golden Age. The former novel is set in the past, and the latter in a post-holocaust future. The overt preaching of the message often jars; it is treated more subtly or more occasionally in the excellent historical novel Spartacus (1933) and in his stories set in the Middle East and particularly Cairo (The Calends of Cairo (1930), The Lost Trumpet (1932), Persian Dawns, Egyptian Nights (1932)). Mitchell also ventures abroad in his non-fiction to deal with the theme of exploration in Hanno (1928), Niger: the Life of Mungo Park (1934), and Nine Against the Unknown (1934). The Conquest of the Maya (same year again) sees explorers arrive at the narrative's end and wipe out the Central American Indian civilisation which has been the main object of description.

All of this on its own qualifies Mitchell as a writer of some distinction. It is the Scottish fiction, though, that has been ranked the highest. A Scots Quair was praised for its authenticity, its outspokenness, its beauty, and its superbly effective use of

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6 The most prominent Diffusionist, Grafton Elliot Smith, unashamedly believed in British Imperialism as the way forward for the world: see Keith Dixon, "Letting the Side Down: Some Remarks on James Leslie Mitchell/ Lewis Grassic Gibbon's Vision of History", in Études Écossaises no. 1: Écosse: Regards d'Histoire: Actes du Congrès international d'études écossaises, Grenoble, 1991 (Grenoble, 1992), pp.264-85 (280-81).

synthesised Lallans. Admirers included Wells, J.B. Priestley, Hugh MacDiarmid and Neil Gunn.[7] With MacDiarmid, Mitchell published a book of essays, stories and poems entitled Scottish Scene (1934). His short stories therein are of the same order as the Quair; the essays are masterpieces of polemic, wit and lyricism if not accuracy. Partly as a result of overwork, Mitchell died in early 1935, leaving a novel unfinished (to be republished in 1982 by Ian Campbell as The Speak of the Mearns). His reputation was kept fiercely alive by his widow Ray until her death in 1978; mainstream critical interest had begun to pick up just over a decade before, when Ian Munro's biography was written.

Critics of recent years may be divided up into the Kailyarders, the Marxians, and Frye's disciples. Kailyarder-in-chief is Mitchell's biographer Ian Munro, whose picture of Mitchell is one of a son of the soil, a lad o' pairts, who had attachments rooted deeply in the red Mearns earth.[8] Indeed he was and did, but such formulaic and simplified treatment makes the book a disaster. Purporting to take Mitchell's side against the kailyard, Munro commits its favoured sins of sentimentality, cliché, provincialism, and insufficient attention to historical context. Ian Campbell's short primer on Mitchell may also be considered under this heading.[9] Less disastrous than Munro, he explores the relation between kailyard, anti-kailyard and the Quair in some detail; the same over-attention to North-east Scottishness, though, is still apparent.

The Marxian school have attempted to blast this away and deal with Mitchell the cosmopolitan materialist. They have succeeded to some extent, although sometimes at the cost of lucidity. There are noticeable overlaps between the four Ph.D.s in this category, though Keith Dixon describes his work as a contextualisation of Mitchell

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7 See Ian Munro, Lewis Grassic Gibbon (London, 1966), pp. 68,75,149.

8 Munro, Lewis Grassic Gibbon.

9 Ian Campbell, Lewis Grassic Gibbon (Edinburgh, 1985).

within the ideological crises of the thirties,[10] and Michael McGrath takes more of a biographical look, asking where Mitchell picked up his radical ideas and which particular activist groups he belonged to.[11] Dixon and McGrath are both of the communist persuasion, while Uwe Zagratzki is an anarchist, who points out with some justification how anarchically subversive Mitchell is of authoritarian values, and how limited it is to site his work merely alongside communist / socialist thought. The oddest of the Marxists is undoubtedly Ricardo Figueroa, a social scientist by trade, whose attempts at a scientific analysis of Mitchell involve pages of sociological elaboration and then founder in lengthy attempts to champion the often mediocre Middle East short stories over and above the Scottish material.[12]

Figueroa also has connections with the Frye group; showing great interest in the quests, grails and fertility myths buried or overt in Mitchell's work, he journeys on that ultimate quest for "the kingdom that lies beyond, in fact, the cultural revolution".[13] In a sense Figueroa is right about what his subject was after, despite his artless, quasi-Maoist expression of the idea. The original Frye critic, though, is Douglas Young.[14] His study, on Mitchell and Diffusionist thought, sets great store by the Golden Age idea, tracing it through Hesiod, Ovid, and Rousseau to the polymath scientist Grafton Elliot Smith, writing in the '20s and '30s. Young sees in the Quair not so much an encounter with the Scottish twentieth century as a powerful reworking of ancient myth. He also uses Frye's idea of the "anatomy" to deal with the stylisation of the characters in Stained Radiance, as does Gordon Watt, who classifies The

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[10] Keith Dixon, "Crise et Idéologie".

[11] Michael McGrath, "Lewis Grassic Gibbon/ James Leslie Mitchell: A Study in Politics and Ideas in Relation to his Life and Work" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1983).

[12] Ricardo Figueroa, "Lewis Grassic Gibbon and the Model of Society" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 1984).

[13] Figueroa, p.301.

[14] Douglas Young, "A Study of the Relevance of the Non-Fiction to the Fiction in the Works of James Leslie Mitchell/ Lewis Grassic Gibbon" (doctoral thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1969) published as Beyond the Sunset (Aberdeen, 1973).

Thirteenth Disciple, The Lost Trumpet, and Image and Superscription as "autobiographical romances" and Three Go Back and Gay Hunter as "scientific romances".[15] Frye explains all, it would appear: certainly Douglas Gifford, who concentrates on Spartacus and the Quair, would tend to this view. He compares Gibbon to Gunn, and Gunn comes out the winner.[16] Despite the rain early in Sunset Song symbolically ending the dry season and making the wasteland fertile, the novel is a "Song of Death" and Gibbon is always on a "Journey to Despair", unlike Gunn whose Highland River is the "River of Life".

Less pessimistic readings have been made of Mitchell. William Malcolm[17] believes that the Quair's end shows faith in the cosmic-ecological processes of renewal, as Chris merges with nature. More usefully, he explores links with socialist realism and other European intertexts (Zola, Remarque) and sees Mitchell as a precursor of Absurdism. Malcom's study is multifaceted, mixing philosophical, political and literary discussions; he is let down, however, by gratuitous Arnoldian remarks on Mitchell's "moral vision"[18] and by lack of attention to Mitchell's feminism (picked up by all the Marxian men, by a chapter in Carol Anderson's thesis on women and Scottish fiction,[19] and by Deirdre Burton's article on the Quair).[20]

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15 Gordon Watt, "Paths to Utopia: A Study of the Fiction of James Leslie Mitchell/ Lewis Grassic Gibbon" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 1977).

16 Douglas Gifford, Neil M. Gunn and Lewis Grassic Gibbon (Edinburgh, 1983).

17 William Malcolm, "A Blasphemer and Reformer : A Study of the Novels and Stories of James Leslie Mitchell/ Lewis Grassic Gibbon in the Light of his Political and Philosophical Thinking" (doctoral thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1982) published as A Blasphemer and Reformer: A Study of James Leslie Mitchell/ Lewis Grassic Gibbon (Aberdeen, 1984).

18 Malcolm, front flap of book.

19 Anderson, unpublished Ph.D. thesis "The Representation of Women in Scottish Fiction: Image and Symbol" (Edinburgh, 1985).

20 Deirdre Burton, "A Feminist Reading of Lewis Grassic Gibbon's A Scots Quair" , in Jeremy Hawthorn (ed.), The British Working Class Novel in the Twentieth Century (London, 1984), pp. 34-46.

My thesis intends to redress a major omission in all work to date: no sustained analysis has been made of Mitchell's representation and discussion of race, in all the national, cultural and biological manifestations it takes in his work. Material exists here and there on Mitchell and Scottishness or Mitchell and anti-colonialism, but only as part of a discussion about something else. Mitchell's Marxian critics have tended to look at race as merely a question of nationalism, something in turn to do with socio-economic forces. Mitchell is held to be a class warrior not really interested in banging nationalist drums. Much of the tenor here, if not the politics, is that of non-Marxist Ernest Gellner's study of nationalism. Gellner's attitude, one of an assumed, breezy common sense, looks continually to explain nationalism logically, using categories of class or social organisation. Nation states came into being, he argues, when during industrialisation it became necessary for regions connected by business to have greater cultural and linguistic ties than had previously existed. Nationalism is the logical outcome of the industrial revolution, and continues due to people wanting a better standard of living and way of life than their neighbours. Nationalists' ideas of unity reaching further back than a couple of centuries are fantasies. The explanatory base is staightforwardly social; the superstructures on top of this are not so worthy of attention. Terms such as "racism" or "hatred" do not enter Gellner's account. With McGrath, Dixon and Zagratzki too, nationalism is important only because of its function as a smokescreen for the *important* social issues. Mitchell, they argue, realised this: by and large racism and hatred are likewise unimportant for them.

Decidedly anti-nationalist himself, Gellner pours scorn on what he characterises as the hysterical analyses of other anti-nationalists involving "Dark Gods", "atavism", and "blood and territory".[21] While Gellner does explicitly believe that irrationalism is common to nationalists, he is just too much of a self-styled materialist to think it worth discussing. Tom Nairn, on the other hand, while maintaining strong Marxist or materialist links, does think emphasis is worth putting on irrational forces:

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21 Ernest Gellner Nations and Nationalism (Oxford, 1983), p. 130.

> It is through nationalism that societies try to propel themselves forward to [. . .] industrialisation, prosperity, equality with other peoples etc. *by a certain sort of repression* -- by looking inwards, drawing more deeply upon their indigenous resources, resurrecting past folk-heroes and myths about themselves and so on.[22]

Marxists have generally failed to appreciate in society what Freud has seen in man:

> Given the colossal strains of industrialisation, and the variety and intensity of forces which this challenge unchained into more conscious activity, there is in a general sense nothing amazing about the emergence of irrationality into modern history.[23]

For Nairn, then, the warping effect of the creation of such nationalisms, combined with the tensions of modern industrial development, make the unpredictable and the irrational crucial in his account. On the subject of repression, though, European history since 1989 confirms that nationalism was repressee as much as repressor; Nairn's emphasis looks a little skewed. I am making critical mention of Gellner and Nairn here, incidentally, not to lock Mitchell's visions of race into any particular system or find any one key to explain the genesis of his ideas, but rather the opposite: to prepare the ground for seeing his ideas on race and nationhood as combinations of the rational and the irrational. This will include a fear of the ethnic Other and a smattering of prejudices derived from a multiplicity of sources, alongside a desire to polemicise provocatively about several social and political issues.

The above-mentioned Marxist McGrath believes that all you need is class, and this is best exemplified by his analysis of the episode in Three Go Back in which the hero and heroine discuss the destruction of the Neanderthal race, a crucial event in their timewarp adventure. The Neanderthals, "a sub-human species that are almost men" (p.212), have all conveniently perished and thus made way for the Cro-Magnards, who are sensitive, intelligent, and further up the evolutionary ladder. The Neanderthals had a "maladjustment of body and a general odd, black resentment

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22 Tom Nairn The Break-Up of Britain (London, 1977), p.381 .

23 ibid.

against life" says Keith. "Like the militarists and the hanging judges and the gloomy deans of the twentieth century?" asks Clair. "Exactly," replies Keith. Later on, Clair resolves to fight for progress in her own century "while there are still Neanderthalers in generals' uniforms" (p.252). For an uncritical McGrath,

> What Clair is effectively advocating is a class war against present-day Neanderthals on behalf of the brutalised and degraded descendants of the Cro-Magnards of the vanished Golden Age.[24]

This implies an arbitrary division of Mitchell's peers into the good and beautiful (Cro-Magnard) and the bad and ugly (Neanderthal). Unless this is merely a conceit with spiritual, not material, meaning, Mitchell's readers are presumably to set about exterminating the latter group. No critic to date has shown interest in the overtones here of racial superiorism and legitimised mass killing. Three Go Back will be returned to; it will be enough here to suggest that the Neanderthals signify not just a class but a multivalent Other, with a potential for correspondence with whichever race a Mitchell reader happens not to like. There is a similarly crude opposition made between good Picts and bad Kelts in Mitchell's warped history of his country. This point will be addressed not in the Scotland chapter itself, but in chapter four, in the appropriate context of Mitchell's all-round breadth of race invective.

Gillian Beer writes compellingly in Darwin's Plots on the links between class and race:

> The fascination with race is for many Victorian[s] essentially a fascination with class. [They] raise the same questions of descent, genealogy, mobility, the possibility of development and transformation. [. . .] Thackeray in an early essay shows how ideas of class and race condense: "The inhabitants of our own nation are more remote, less known about than the remote and the exotic." [25]

Writing about Darwin and interested in making Marxian comments where possible,

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[24] McGrath, p.57.

[25] Gillian Beer, Darwin's Plots (London, 1983), p. 202.

Beer argues that the Victorians understood race in terms of class, as Mitchell's characters try to do in the Three Go Back example. One could also go the other way, from Marx to Darwin, as when reading the Neanderthal episode against itself. Race and class can be about each other, though there is obviously more to each.

Mitchell's callousness over the real and metaphorical Neanderthalers will recall the spectacular misanthropy of several of his contemporaries, such as D.H. Lawrence,[26] but especially his hero H.G. Wells, who in Anticipations and other futuristic works predicts the destruction of non-white populations as the logical way forward for mankind.[27] Wells will come into this thesis often; Mitchell first read him at the age of nine, wanted to write like him, and sent copies of at least five of his books to Wells.[28] He borrows themes, quotations, images, plot details and paragraphs from Wells with shameless alacrity. Specific debts are not always acknowledged, although the general debt is conceded in the semi-autobiographical The Thirteenth Disciple:

> Mr Wells it was who, scattering feline Shavian and amphibian Blatchfordian, finally ran me to earth near the drinking pools, sprinkled me liberally with a scientific Epsom salts, and devoured me at a gulp [. . .]. At odd moments I still suffer from the bleaching effects of my intra-Wellsian immersion. (p.61)

Chapters two and three will deal with Mitchell's unfavourable treatment of Scotland and favourable treatment of England; his borrowings from Wells's England as seen in

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26 Lawrence's Women in Love (Harmondsworth, 1988; first published 1921) springs to mind, containing a number of directly-expressed wishes to kill everyone on the planet, e.g. Birkin's desire "to know that the earth would really be cleaned of all the people", p.142.

27 H.G. Wells, Anticipations (London, 1902).

28 See IUL special collections, letter from Ray Mitchell to Wells, 29 November 1938: "We were introduced to your books, at the age of nine, by a Scottish crofter and we became s[t]eeped in Wells. Leslie had ambitions to write like Wells." See same collection for letters from Leslie Mitchell to Wells accompanying copies of Hanno (12 June 1928) Stained Radiance (25 October 1930) Thirteenth Disciple (15 January 1931) Calends of Cairo (5 June 1931) Persian Dawns, Egyptian Nights (27 October 1932).

The War of the Worlds, Tono-Bungay and Marriage will be shown after a look at the Scottish oeuvre, where the literary debts are more diffuse.

Chapter four will be about the rest of the world, covering Mitchell's interest in exploration, his naked racial bombast and, most importantly, his engagement with the problems of representing the Orient in the Eastern fiction. Chapter five will look at sex, biology and the future of the race, drawing on Mitchell's use of Wells's science fiction; chapter six will discuss the individual attempting to move beyond the predominant culture, if not the race as a whole, in Wells and Mitchell. Before any of this, however, chapter one will discuss what civilisation means to Mitchell with all its connotations good and bad, how mankind classifies and sub-classifies itself, what civilisation means in Diffusionist terms, how it interacts with race and nationality, how modern civilisation's scientific capabilities are estimated, and how he sees civilisation's history.

Some of the above may read as if a purely destructive exercise in Mitchell criticism is being proposed, on the lines of John Carey's readable, fascinating and one-dimensional study The Intellectuals and the Masses in which most Modernists are revealed to be eugenicists or awful snobs or fascists or some combination of these.[29] This is not going to be the case. Mitchell shows some streaks of fascism, but to place him in the Carey rogues' gallery would be ill-advised. My study will be more inclined to non-polemical comparison, while reserving the right to strong criticism on occasion and the right to attack the version of things implicit or explicit in Dixon or Zagratzki: that Mitchell's politically progressive aspects are the only interesting ones. As I will be often dealing with fairly unfamiliar material, there will sometimes be extensive quotation from the less well-known parts of Mitchell's oeuvre. At other times, reinterpretations will be made on more familiar ground (e.g. Scotland) which has often been covered by critics.

Discussions of the Quair will occupy a sizeable proportion of the thesis, as befits

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[29] John Carey, The Intellectuals and the Masses (London, 1992).

Mitchell's most complex work. It will not dominate, however, to the extent that it has generally done in previous criticism. My interest is in race and nationality as it appears in Mitchell's work as a whole, and these issues crop up everywhere. To concentrate on the ambiguities of the Quair's heroine Chris in relation to Scotland while writing off the ubiquitous bombast as simply uninteresting journalism is to dismiss a mass of revealing material. It is also worth considering that Mitchell himself ranked his work bizarrely, believing that his stories set in Egypt were better than his Scottish fiction,[30] and for some time not believing that writing about Scotland would actually be worthwhile.[31] There is apparently little intention on his part to make the Scottish work his will and testament.

As regards questions of chronological development, Mitchell did obviously mature in technique from the experimental early short stories and Stained Radiance to Sunset Song's assurance in flashback narrative and Scottish-cum-English style by 1932. The calculated fragmentation of Grey Granite sees further development of a kind without any substantial move away from the basic style established earlier in the trilogy.[32] Any development of his views on race, however, is hard to identify. One major ideological change is the espousal of Diffusionism; support for the creed is absent in Hanno or Stained Radiance but present from The Thirteenth Disciple on. In very general terms one might figure an increase in pessimism, Grey Granite being his most pessimistic book, written in 1934. Whether one wishes to ascribe this to his pessimism about Scotland, or the world, or some other reason will always be in debate; I will be contending that the book's mood is very much to do with Scotland. Mitchell's career writing books as such was seven years long; had he been alive to agonise about the Spanish Civil War there would no doubt have been ideological

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30 See Munro, pp.102-03.

31 See Memoir by Jean Baxter, p.6, AUL Special Collections MS 2377.

32 For the best analysis of the Quair's style, see Ramon Lopez Ortega, "Language and Point of View in Lewis Grassic Gibbon's A Scots Quair", in Studies in Scottish Literature (1981), vol.XVI, pp.148-159.

shifts of some kind. As it is, we have most of the time a Diffusionist writer with leanings towards Communism for short-term remedies and anarchism for the longer term, who writes book after book at speed, aiming abusive polemic at numerous targets, individual and collective. Often apparently writing from the heart about the threat of war, his origins on the land, the urge to explore the unknown and the lot of women in childbirth, he also wishes to be saleable by using sex, violence, racial exotica and racial hatred in generous measure. Mitchell's pen does jump quirkily from subject to subject; McGrath is justified in claiming that

> Mitchell sometimes displays an exasperating tendency to introduce an idea in his work, develop it to a certain point and then retreat from the edge, as it were, before the nature and extent of that idea become manifest and therefore amenable to critical evaluation.[33]

The following chapters, however, will demonstrate themes and concerns that recur significantly, and will thus establish unities of a kind about his work.

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[33] McGrath, p.viii.

Chapter 1: Civilisation

Introduction

For Mitchell, the term "civilisation" functions mainly as a dirty word. It is used most often in the sense of the network of mankind's superfluous institutions such as the state and religion. Bodies such as these, the story goes, have regimented and brutalised the originally free and untrammelled natural man, as this chapter's first section proper, "Origins, Fall-out" will recount. The next, "Apocalypse", continues Mitchell's story. Having regimented and brutalised on a local and piecemeal basis for the bulk of human history, civilisation threatens in the twentieth century to do even worse. Global culture and military-industrial complexes now being what they are, apocalyptic destruction from the next world war seems realistically possible.

There have been advantages, however, in the bandwagon of civilisation continuing to roll. It has been generally to the good that the bloodthirsty cultures of Ancient Mexico and Scottish Calvinism were overturned by Cortes and the industrial revolution respectively. Advanced may be better than basic, as the essay "Antique Scene" sees it:

> It is evident that in the ancient scene in Mexico [. . .] where every year thousands of people were being sacrificed to the Gods of the earth and rain, that a few more hundred years of evolution along the same lines would have wrought a biological deviation from the human norm: the ancient Mexicans, but for the fortunate arrival of Cortes, would have aberrated into a sub-species of homo sapiens. The same might be said of the Scots. Left alone and uninvaded, they might have passed entirely beyond the orbit of the normally human but for the coming of the industrial revolution. (ScSc, p.317)*

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* Mitchell has seven essays in Scottish Scene: "Antique Scene", "The Wrecker", "Glasgow", "Literary Lights", "Aberdeen", "The Land" and "Religion". Page references will generally run <ScSc, p.x>, but <ScSc> will be replaced by the essay title where the latter is particularly important or where clarity is needed.

As Marx says, the industrial revolution was simultaneously the best and the worst thing that could happen to man, generating unparalleled human degradation but also unparalleled societal progress.[1] The same idea, specific to Scotland, is implicit in Mitchell's essay. Just as interesting in the above extract, though, is the idea of cultural and racial traits blurring. One sees this elsewhere: the pathology of inhibited sexuality as found in Scotland (see "Religion", the Quair) and that of perverted sex-mania as found in the Middle East (see the short stories) started with an institutional or social cause, but resulted in a something effectively identifiable in Mitchell's eyes as racial. These characteristics are not fixed as such, but part of the more delicate processes of human evolution.

Evolution, or various vulgarised versions of it, is a concept with which Mitchell wishes to show great familiarity. He has great respect for the achievements of the human and physical sciences -- though disagreeing with several individuals in several fields. Ironically, these sciences obviously rest on the establishment of present, hated civilisation and social order. Ideally man would be a more natural, uncivilised animal; as he is not, he would do well to know himself and his relation to everything else through the study of biology, palaeontology, archaeology and so on. As the third section, "Science", suggests, the best kinds of interrogation of the natural and cultural worlds can establish the previous existence of natural man and the circumstances of the spreading of civilisation throughout the world. This necessitates the study (and necessary revision) of history, and the appreciation of some of the cultural and artistic achievements of civilisations of the past, whether in Central America, West Africa, or even Scotland. The fourth section, "Civilisation's Records" will explore Mitchell's

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[1] See Karl Marx, The Communist Manifesto (first published 1849), in Jon Elster (ed.), Karl Marx: A Reader (Cambridge, 1986) , p.227. For veiled exploitation the bourgeoisie has substituted "naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation", yet "the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society".

deep-seated ambiguities about the usefulness and desirability of preserving the cultural records of the past.

Race and nationhood relate to this argument at each stage. The threat to civilisation by global war means a threat to humanity as a species and to individual countries. The last war has coincided with, and hastened the extinction of, the old breed of Scottish crofter; war in the past has nearly wiped out Mitchell's friends, the Central American Maya Indians. In the case of the Maya and numerous other unfortunates, the destroyers have been Europeans, who have led the world in elaborating scientific, taxonomic systems (whether accurate or inaccurate) not least in the potentially lethal field of ethnic classification. Reserved about the efforts of other anatomists and ethnologists, Mitchell himself gets in on the act of confident race-generalisation when it is convenient. His will-to-description, however, is not merely of the cold-blooded kind. He wishes to describe nations or groups now vanished: to put on record, despite his highly-advertised hatred of the past and of old ways, what information he can about extinct tribes and extinct modes of living. The good Marxist Diffusionist has to interest himself in virtually everything.

1 Origins, Fall-out

> All civilisations originated in ancient Egypt. Through the accident of time and chance and the cultivation of wild barley in the Valley of the Nile, there arose on a single spot of the earth's surface the urge in men to upbuild for their economic salvation the great fabric of civilisation. Before the planning of that architecture enslaved the minds of men, man was a free and undiseased animal wandering the world in the Golden Age of the poets (and reality) from the Shetlands to Tierra del Fuego. And from that central focal point in Ancient Egypt the first civilizers spread abroad the globe the beliefs and practices, the diggings and plantings and indignations and shadowy revilements of the Archaic Civilisation. (ScSc, p. 124)

This is the story (as it appears in the essay on Scotland, "Antique Scene") of humanity in outline, condensed from the writings of Diffusionist anthropologists and writers such as Perry, Rivers, Massingham, and most crucially Grafton Elliot Smith,

whose Human History (1930) became Mitchell's bible.[2] Smith-Perry-Rivers-style fundamentalist Diffusionism has been regarded as lunatic fringe material for some time now, although debates in archaeological circles continue about the (limited) Diffusion of agriculture, building and language.[3]

The paragraph quoted above is from Mitchell's para-historical tale of the first invasions of Scotland in "Antique Scene", which sets up the aggressive civilised versus peaceful Golden-Agers before moving on to lambast a more familiar set of Scottish names from Mary Queen of Scots to Bonnie Prince Charlie. For more extended treatment of the condition of natural man, however, we must look to the fiction that is advertised as fiction, and in particular to the scientific romances Three Go Back and Gay Hunter.

The former novel takes us and its protagonists back about twenty thousand years to the lost continent of Atlantis, where unashamedly naked golden-haired men and women run as fast as horses, live effectively carefree lives without being told what to do by anyone (though a community ethic of mutual aid is considered self-evident) and have a marriage system involving a woman's right to turn down a prospective partner. War seems entirely unknown to them. Their behaviour converts a right-wing M.P. from militarism to a benevolent pacifism, and convinces his two companions from the future (or, the 1932 present) that they have found the ideal way to live, that our civilisation has everything wrong. A similar Utopia is presented in Gay Hunter. The survivors of an atomic holocaust have developed into the hunter-gatherer society that

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[2] For summary of such influences as Perry, Rivers and Massingham, see Young, Beyond the Sunset, p.10. See also Grafton Elliot Smith, Human History (London, 1930).

[3] See Colin Renfrew, Before Civilisation (Harmondsworth, 1990; first published 1987), in particular the chapters "Collapse of the Traditional Framework" and "Beyond Diffusion" (pp.93-132) in which European megaliths are shown to predate Egyptian ones; also Marek and Kamil Zwelebil, "Agricultural Tradition and Indo-European Dispersals", in Antiquity , vol.62 (1988), pp.574-83, who disagree with Renfrew about agricultural and linguistic diffusion from the Near East.

Gay meets twenty thousand years in her future. She observes their happiness, peacefulness, unselfconscious song culture, and freedom from sexual inhibition. Her happiest moments occur when she leaves aside her twentieth century values and throws herself enthusiastically into their way of life.

Apart from the incursions of outside forces such as Neanderthal or modern man, relatively trouble-free harmony and endless variations on delight are the rule for Mitchell's Golden Age. Nostalgic ideals located in prehistory such as these come under attack from both snobs and populists interested in major ideas circulating in the 1920s and '30s. Clive Bell, from a lofty high-culture perspective in Civilisation (1928) derides the "cult of innocence and animality" which advocates going "back to the inter-tidal scum, via arts and crafts, gardening and abuse of Voltaire [. . .] small coteries to regret ingeniously and melodiously even the lost pleasures of ignorance and the beatitude of unattainable imbecility".[4] John Carey, writing in a study of the period some 64 years on (and, incidentally a savage critic of Bell) attacks the fetishising of primitivism and the "cult of the peasant", tracing it through Morris, Yeats and Synge to Lawrence and Forster and putting the emphasis in accounting for it onto a patrician hatred of the urban masses.[5] These suspicions worry Mitchell little. He does distance himself from G.K. Chesterton's writerly embracing of the ideals of peasant life in The Thirteenth Disciple (p.23) and then quotes his own distancing passage in Scottish Scene, but then agriculture stands in direct opposition to the hunter-gatherer mode of the Golden Age, which has by contrast to Chesterton and others everything to offer, at least as inspiration.

Civilisation offers the reverse of what is offered in Gay Hunter and Three Go Back: hierarchies, violence, twisted sexuality, and decadent aestheticism. All this and more we can find in Spartacus. Power, violence, perversion and art go together in Roman culture: the merchant who owns the young Kleon has him whipped and then anointed and makes him read out tales of rapes and obscenities before using him as his catamite

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[4] Clive Bell, Civilisation (London, 1928), p.195.

[5] Carey, p.36.

(pp.1-3). The patrician "harlot" Lavinia has "experimented with slaves in moments of idle curiosity as to how a mutilated man behaved and cried" (p.92); the Governor of Cisalpine Gaul, Gaius Cassius "was a man of culture, and knew that without the strong arm of law men would live in misery and fear" (p.125). Infected with leprosy, he fondles the pick of his terrified child slaves.

Slaves are necessary for the governing classes to enjoy their pleasures; this is not merely true in the extreme, bygone world of Spartacus but finds contemporary analogues. Going back to Clive Bell, Bloomsbury's champion, we find the following barefaced assertion:

> Civilisation requires the existence of a leisured class, and a leisured class requires the existence of slaves -- of people, I mean, who give some part of their surplus time and energy to the support of others.[6]

This picks up Oscar Wilde's suggestion that civilisation needs slaves in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism", although Wilde then identifies these slaves as (in the coming era) machines.[7] Bell appears not to want any part of this. The slaves are humans, and word's qualification following the dash appears to have little force. How far can one take "leisured", and why the need to use "slaves" unless Bell wants underlings of some sort to despise, rather than, simply, people who mine coal while he writes books? One inference might be made concerning his ideas of relative pay packets. Bell remarks in another giveaway phrase, picked up by Carey, that "there are now but two or three restaurants in London where it is an unqualified pleasure to dine."[8] Such nerve as this can be matched only by Mitchell's friend Hugh MacDiarmid: his In Memoriam James Joyce, bemoaning the fact that so few are as well read as MacDiarmid, declares that "in each one hundred thousand souls/ Five are

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6 Bell, p.205.

7 Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism", in The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde (London, 1966), pp. 1079-1104 (1089). "Soul" first published, 1891.

8 Bell, quoted by Carey, p.80.

reasonably civilised".[9] This is from 1955, twenty years after Mitchell's death, but no more than MacDiarmid tends to suggest in his often elitist writing.

Once the term "civilised" is used, the implication can be not just the maintenance of a leisured class depending on the work of others, but a leisured class depending on the work of marked inferiors; destructive hierarchies are unavoidable. Mitchell is interested in the slavery in Spartacus being counterpointed by modern industrial slavery. The anarchist Zagratzki suggests in his chapter on Gay Hunter that civilisation and fascism are "in phase"[10] rather as some early twentieth century Marxists claimed fascism to be merely a small extension of capitalism.[11] Violence, springing from civilisation/ capitalism, is inevitable. The social system in Grey Granite's Duncairn is held together by institutionalised violence; demonstrations against low pay or unemployment or chemical warfare are met with police brutality. Such violence as this, internally endemic to civilised regimes, is also endemic across borders. If classes wish to dine while others are worked to death, so may whole nations as well. The majority of Mitchell's novels are set explicitly against the background of the Great War, the logical outcome of what Domina in Thirteenth Disciple describes as civilisation's "brain fever", "world madness and nightmare" and "a horrible film over the face of the earth". The War itself, though, gets people to question authority and tradition: indeed, it "split [civilisation] from head to foot" (p.193). However much Mitchell deplores civilisation, modern threats to it worry him as much as anyone else.

2 Apocalypse

Mitchell's mentor Wells has ample inspirational material about ends of the world in his early novels. Bernard Bergonzi puts this in the context of *fin de siècle* thought in

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[9] Hugh MacDiarmid, In Memoriam James Joyce, in Complete Poems (London, 1978), pp.737-889 (862).

[10] Zagratzki, p.177.

[11] See, for instance, David Forgacs' account of this line of thought in Rethinking Italian Fascism: Capitalism, Populism and Culture (London, 1986), pp.24-27.

his critical work The Early Wells: his subject began writing in the eighteen-nineties, the era of English decadence and the Yellow Book. In this decade the feeling prevailed that the century as a whole "-- which had contained more events, more history than any other -- had gone on too long, and that sensitive souls were growing weary of it."[12] More specifically, a concern had been accumulating about the possible "invasion of England followed by the partial or total defeat of the nation".[13] After this introduction, Bergonzi focuses on a number of Wellsian confrontations with or refractions of such a feeling. His account includes The Time Machine where race extinction by natural non-selection is far distant, The War of the Worlds which proposes an advanced Martian civilisation coming within a whisker of conquering the earth before succumbing to our own forms of disease, and The First Men in the Moon, where a technologically superior Lunar civilisation begins to look ominous for earth's future. One can also cite as fairly apocalyptic The Food of the Gods which imagines a race of giants being developed due to carelessness in science laboratories; The War in the Air with its destruction of most of the earth's life through mass civilian bombing or Tono-Bungay where alongside the threat of war it is suggested that the Edwardian credit system is coming apart and that the nation's spiritual malaise is growing fast.[14]

Wells is one key source for visions of apocalypse; there is also the context of the literary thirties themselves. Auden's brash opening to his poem "Danse Macabre" conveys one of the decade's distinctive tones concerning the end of civilisation as we know it:

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[12] Bernard Bergonzi, The Early H.G. Wells: A Study of the Scientific Romances (Manchester, 1961), p.3.

[13] Bergonzi, p.12.

[14] Wells, The Time Machine (London, 1895); The War of the Worlds (London, 1898); The First Men in The Moon (London, 1901); The Food of the Gods (London, 1904); The War in The Air (London, 1908); Tono-Bungay (London, 1909).

It's farewell to the drawing-room's civilised cry,
The professor's sensible whereto and why,
The frock-coated diplomat's social aplomb,
Now matters are settled with gas and with bomb.[15]

Valentine Cunningham's chapter "Destructive Elements" trawls the work of Auden, Waugh, Eliot, Leavis, Caudwell and dozens of others who warn of crisis and wait for the end. This crisis is about economic collapse for some, especially at the decade's beginning, following the Wall Street Crash of 1929. Later on, impending war becomes the concern as the European powers begin to re-arm in earnest; Mitchell's The Thirteenth Disciple and Grey Granite are on to this worry early, and wait for future soldiers "dying like flies on the wire" (TD, p.255) and "skinned to death or else toasted like winkles in front of a fire" (GG, p.187). Art, too, is in crisis for some Marxists and for F.R. Leavis -- not for Mitchell, though: his letter in Left Review declares that "although capitalist economics have reached the point of collapse", "capitalist literature, whether we like it or not, is not in decay".[16]

Mitchell's visions of extinction, not confined to the thirties, are often specific about other doomed groups at other times. There are groups he morally favours which nevertheless perish; one example being Spartacus' entire slave army and counter-culture, killed in the final battle with Crassus or crucified on the Appian Way. Another example, to jump to the twentieth century, would be the crofting communities of Scotland. Sunset Song sees the crofters of Kinraddie village vanish under the pressure of war and of underlying economic forces as large-scale farming takes over. The new minister, Colquohoun, delivers an impressive elegy:

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15 W .H. Auden, "Danse Macabre", in Collected Shorter Poems, 1930-1944 (London, 1950), p.77.

16 Cunningham, "Destructive Elements": for the sense of crisis, see pp.36-44; for quote from the Mitchell article -- originally published in Left Review (February, 1935) -- see p.42.

> *With them we may say there died a thing older than themselves, these were the last of the peasants, the last of the old Scots folk. A new generation comes up that will know them not, except as a memory in a song, they pass with the things that seemed good to them, with loves and desires that grow dim and alien in the days to be. It was the old Scotland that perished then, and we may believe that never again will the old songs, the old curses and the old benedictions, rise but with alien effort to our lips.* (p.256)

Mitchell also concerns himself with the end of cultures of which he is less fond: the fascistic Hierarchs of Gay Hunter receive some attention regarding how their system fell; a whole work, The Conquest of the Maya, is devoted to the strange, bloody, sacrifice-happy Maya civilisation of Central America, which declines and gives way to Inca and Aztec successor-cultures -- which are destroyed in their turn by invading Spaniards. The book's epilogue shows Mitchell, back with the Maya, trying to show pity but not knowing quite what to make of his weird history:

> We see them on the painted boards of pseudo-history, a little people, a little cult, dreaming its dreams and passing; and whether that is to us only a play and procession of days and ghosts, or indictment for the crimes and codes of our own civilization [. . .] it is for each who reads to decide or forget.
> It left to the common mind of man not a single thought or aspiration of importance. [. . .] But a wider imagination brings understanding and a growing sympathy for these remotest men of the ancient Golden Age. (CoM, p.269)

One has to come back, though, to the Great War as Mitchell's major apocalyptic phenomenon, almost destroying the world in The Thirteenth Disciple and Image and Superscription and prefiguring another war, ultimate and worse in The Thirteenth Disciple and Grey Granite as mentioned above. Mitchell occasionally sees the Great War in Marxist terms: Malcom Maudslay confidently declares that "Germany is after our markets" (TD, p.61) -- though his brother Robert is ready with a facetious reply: "What! the Leekan cattle-mart?" Occasionally he sees it in terms that might be taken as Freudian or Darwinian, quoting Karl Liebknecht on militarism being "a half-witted ape dressed in an old newspaper and a leaf-hat, posturing, red-posterior'd, before admiring females." (GH, p.126) John Garland in Stained Radiance sees militarism

similarly as an "orang with a newspaper cocked on its head" (SR, p.75). The Darwinian view extends further than the last example: war is often for Mitchell what the human race is doing to itself; what some parts of the race are doing to other parts. Gershom Jezreel looks back on 1914-18 like this in Image and Superscription:

> Some other life-form might yet arise and essay the adventure, some beast or bird or insect, life in a form as yet unguessable, but one with a steadfast beacon of surety in mind and heart, not a torn, tortured thing, dragging clanking the chains of its ancestry, blind in the glimpse of a possible morning its bestiality might never essay. (I and S, p.93)

Malcom's friend and superior officer John Metaxa in The Thirteenth Disciple speaks in similar vein when pessimistically distancing himself from the war:

> But what the hell does it matter to me? Humanity might as well play itself out that way as any other. I've no children or any intention of fathering any. I've no faith in the future of those that are fathered. Me, I'm for the ants [. . .].
> Everything points to the ants. We blasted mammals have had our show: we're probably as doomed as the dinosaurs. Way for the insectidae! (p.156)

Mitchell so often emphasises a post-Darwinian consciousness, yet the ideology-based studies of him made so far have centred in discussions of Marxism (four cases) or Diffusionism (one). No-one can deny the importance of these -isms in discussing Mitchell, but they do not cover adequately his views on race and races. It is true that the thoughts expressed about human extinction occur in Image and Superscription before the Diffusionist explanation of the present -- that man would never be violent if he were free -- really gets going (though Metaxa in The Thirteenth Disciple is aware of Golden Age primitives) but the existence of society-based explanations of war cannot make Mitchell's overall, generalised race-speculations, his formulations of man as beast, vanish in significance. There are simply too many of them. Fairly detailed information about Mitchell's reading done in the areas of race and "racial science" is given us in the early chapters of The Thirteenth Disciple, which are highly relevant to

the next section of this chapter covering Mitchell's relationship with scientific knowledge.

3 Science

Long before Darwin comes under fire towards the end of The Thirteenth Disciple for a supposedly unqualified belief in human progress that is at odds with Diffusionism, he appears in a much more positive light. The author-surrogate Malcom reads the Origin of Species at an early age:

> [A]t thirteen it was wonder. He read and understood and pondered and agreed; he procured other Darwin books and voyaged the unplumbed seas with the Beagle of heroic memory; he secured books by Huxley and Haeckel and rejoiced at the discomfiture of the deity. (pp.37-38)

Whatever may not have stayed in the thirteen year old boy's mind, unforgettable would have been the emphasis on the transitoriness of all species to date, the choice being between continual mutation or utter extinction; on the struggle species have with Nature and between their own members. T.H. Huxley, also on Malcom's reading list, stresses that the neo-Darwinian term "survival of the fittest" (coined by Herbert Spencer)[17] is misread when taken to mean "survival of the best"; if the earth cooled, lichens and crabs would outlive the rest of us.[18] This is of course realised in graphic detail in Wells's The Time Machine. Huxley also scrutinises the "fit" and "unfit" in his own society, asking if any sane sheep breeder

> should concern himself with picking out the worst fifty out of a thousand, leaving them on a barren common, till the weakest starved, and then letting the survivors go back to mix with the rest?[19]

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17 Herbert Spencer, Principles of Biology (London, 1864), vol.1, p.444.

18 T. H. Huxley, "Evolution and Ethics" in Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays (London, 1894), p.80.

19 Huxley, p.40.

This is a snub first of all to conventional social engineering, or the lack of it, and then to eugenic doctrines aimed at preserving those judged to be the very best and doing nothing with the poor except sterilisation when practical. Francis Galton, the movement's founder, goes on to advocate "stern compulsion to prevent the free propagation" of the mad, the sick, and the otherwise undesirable.[20] These ideas appear in Wells's early writings. Wells is not as extreme as Galton or Galton's wilder followers, believing in a greater element of what he regards as responsible choice in matters eugenic. Nevertheless, what this "choice" implies invites us to consider

> what it will mean to have half the population of the world, in every generation, restrained from or tempted to evade reproduction! This thing, this euthanasia of the weak and the sensual, is possible.[21]

It is evident that this "half" will have a ludicrously disproportionate amount of non-whites in it. Wells lived his first 34 years in the nineteenth century, in which, according to Peter Fryer, "virtually every scientist and intellectual in Britain [. . .] took it for granted that only people with white skin were capable of thinking and governing".[22] Darwin's The Descent of Man, conditioned by such orthodoxies, speculates that "savages" could one day develop into the equivalents of a Shakespeare or a Newton, but that the differences are enormous, and that it would take some time.[23] Mitchell's guru Elliot Smith writes of Negroes having smaller brains than whites, as if this is a necessary given: he speculates on consequent differences in intelligence, and claims that negroes are "less apt to express subtle shades of emotion".[24] Mitchell, one imagines, might have disagreed, though he does not go on

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20 Francis Galton, Memories of My Life (London, 1908), p.311.

21 Wells, Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought (London, 1902), p.307.

22 Peter Fryer, Staying Power: A History of Black People in Britain (London, 1984), p.169.

23 Charles Darwin, The Descent of Man (London, 1885; first published 1871), p.65.

24 Smith, pp.136,138.

record to say so, other than to concur with Mungo Park in claiming no essential difference between the emotional capabilities of Africans and Europeans (Niger, p.93). Mitchell does inveigh against science-bolstered racism in "Religion", where we see a strong attack against a currently popular ethnologist:

> Man in a primitive condition is not Man Savage. Confusion of these two distinct cultural phases has led to the ludicrous condition of anthropology and ethnology at the present day -- the confusion which produces such eminent Scotsmen as Sir Arthur Keith capable of asserting that racialism is the life-blood of all progress. (ScSc, p.313)

When Mitchell attacks modern civilisation, then, eugenics and racial prejudice are implicated. alongside slavery and institutionalised violence. Yet the scientific knowledge *he* takes such pride in displaying -- as we shall see in a moment -- is dependent on European civilisation and is sometimes implicated in its moral dubiousness. One answer to this problem of embarrassing intellectual ancestry is to reject scientists as soon as they become out of date and subscribe in effect to a theory of permanent scientific revolution. Darwinism is "a wonder" to thirteen-year old Malcom Maudslay as it destroys at least the literal sense of the creation story of Genesis. Elliot Smith, however, comes along to reject the savagery of early human life suggested by Darwin, Huxley, and others, and this means that "the Darwin-Keith-Wells outlook is as dead as the dodo [. . .]. There was never the raving primitive of the history books." (TD, p.188) Image and Superscription wishes the trio of "Tylor, Huxley and Darwin" to be similarly scrapped (p.127).

The Diffusionists, however, do not take their findings to the revolutionary conclusions of Malcom Maudslay. The Thirteenth Disciple's narrator notes that in Malcom's autobiography not only does he suggest that civilisation spread out from a number of different places round the world (contrary to what Mitchell appears to say in the passage quoted above from "Antique Scene") but he

> goes on, rather naively, to upbraid the diffusionists for not following out their conclusions to the logical extreme and attacking contemporary religion, morals, ethics, politics. "Domina is the only logical diffusionist I have ever met." (TD, p.223)

The line of scientific succession, then, goes from Darwin to Elliot Smith to Malcom/ Domina/ Leslie Mitchell. It is on this basis that their "Secular Control Group" has as its ninth Propaganda Point the "Compulsory Periodical Dissolution and Reorganisation of all learned Societies" (p.245). There is an element of hubris, common to the literary thirties, in the Group's "belief in modern ability to organise and direct the Adventure of Mankind" (p.244) -- which sounds suspiciously like the death-blow to any more serious talk about the virtues of Natural Man -- but then Mitchell and his fictional surrogates appear to have things worked out: a combination of Darwin, Marx and Elliot Smith gives him the unabashed confidence in affairs of race and racial science that is evident in concentrated form in the Scottish Scene essays and is spread, slightly thinner, over the rest of his work. With what he knows, Mitchell can unpick Ramsay MacDonald's political theories through scrutiny of his biological metaphors, intimidate the reader with a battery of technical terms, and (a bit more hazily) suggest correlations between hair-colour (implying race) and psychology.

His essay "The Wrecker" attacks the then Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald on a number of fronts such as written style, spoken style, and the betrayal of ideals. The most sustained attack, though, is on other grounds than these: he goes for MacDonald's inadequate conceptualisation of planned socio-economic change. MacDonald uses the idea of "evolution" glibly, never hinting that there are enormous casualties in the course of the real thing. History is "the unfolding of life from the amoeba to the mammal", and it seems not to hurt anyone. Mitchell, being a Communist sympathiser, and believing in changes that necessarily involve casualties, labours this point again and again. He uses the example of a stegosaurus as his instrument of ridicule; it symbolises different things at different stages of his argument, but stands generally for the British body politic. Heavy irony is thrown in, alongside the odd dropped name:

> It was all so plain. Peace to the Abbé Mendel, to his discoveries of violent revolution, from stage to stage, within the sleek skin of evolution. (ScSc, p.101)

Mitchell's imaginary stegosaurus did not "freeze in his swamps and pass from the world for ever", but said:

> "The cold comes on apace. I must discard my scales and grow me some hair." And this the good stegosaurus did, mislaying scales, claws, reptilian intestines and reptilian nature, and was presently a mammoth. (p.97)

During the course of history in the nineteen-twenties, the stegosaurus/ British body politic grows savage, tries to elongate its spine, grows ill; after more of such elaboration, Mitchell finally abandons the dinosaur as metaphor "with regret" (p.107). He pours scorn on MacDonald for his use of Cassell's Popular Educator to get his facts: this shallow, or plain wrong, understanding of evolution's processes has, it is implied, "wrecked" the British Labour Party. His ignorant use of biological half-truths logically implies both "pure Darwinism" and "Weismannism".[25]

A casual familiarity with the scientific community in such performances of erudition goes alongside his frequent use of technical terms. The airmen in Stained Radiance have muddied brains and "pithecanthropic eyes" (p.73). A "dark-pigmented fellah" from Upper Egypt in The Lost Trumpet has "a brutal, prognathous jaw" (p.172). More frequently, Mitchell takes the categories "brachycephalic" (possessing a round-shaped head) and "dolichocephalic" (possessing a longer head) and applies them to various characters:

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25 "Pure Darwinism" is difficult to distil, because Darwin changed his mind on evolutionary issues. Weismann tries to demonstrate that "the mechanical conception of nature very well admits of being united with a teleological conception of the universe", i.e. Nature's rules, that are simply *there*, allow and encourage progressive stages in sophistication among Nature's organisms, i.e. evolution is natural. August Weismann, Studies in the Theory of Descent (London, 1882), p.718.

> [Gay] shook her small dolichocephalic head at the brachycephalic heads of the hunters. (GH, p.67)
>
> Chris would waken [Ewan] up at noon, gleam of bronze hair, dolichocephalic heads rare in Duncairn, his own one only a betwixt- and between. (GG, p.31)

About four decades prior to Mitchell's writing career, Ernest Renan, the foremost authority on race and nationhood of his time, remarks: "Words such as dolichocephalic and brachycephalic have no place in either history or philology."[26] They obviously still have a place in fiction and the discursive essay. Mitchell's casual use of such technical terms extends over several fields: it helps in Hanno to know that "radiolarian muds" are those full of the lowest form of protozoa (p.56) and in Gay Hunter to know that andesite and diorite (p.56) are, respectively, a silicate of alumin, lime and soda and a variety of greenstone -- though perhaps it does not; it helps in Grey Granite to know that epidote, sphene, apatite and zircon (each used as a chapter title) are minerals arranged in an ascending order of hardness. Direct influence in this term-dropping probably comes from Wells, who (to take just two examples from a vast selection) makes his scientist-heroine Ann Veronica learn about the "relation of the brachiopods to the echinodermata"[27] and his main character Blettsworthy in Mr Blettsworthy on Rampole Island wonder "whether the Rampole islanders are dolichocephalic or brachycephalic; my impression is that their skulls are medium assorted".[28] Hugh MacDiarmid displays concentrated recondite erudition throughout his work, including the perhaps justifiable stony opacities of "On a Raised Beach",[29]

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26 Ernest Renan "What is a Nation?" (Sorbonne Lecture, 1882), republished in Homi Bhabha (ed.) Nation and Narration (London, 1990), pp.8-26 (12). Renan generalises ambitiously on flimsy evidence about the Kelts: when *he* dismisses a race- categorising method, such as brachycephalic-dolichocephalic, the method will probably be dubious.

27 Wells, Ann Veronica (London, 1909), p.164.

28 Wells, Mr Blettsworthy on Rampole Island (London, 1928), p.147.

29 Hugh MacDiarmid, "On a Raised Beach" in Complete Poems, pp.422-33. First published, 1934.

the less justifiable name-droppings of linguistic philosophy in In Memoriam James Joyce, and (in Scottish Scene) the "geoselenic gimbal" and "epirhizous posture" in the poem "In the Caledonian Forest" (p. 67). As well as the verbose autodidact MacDiarmid, one also thinks of the showy undergraduate Auden, of whom Stephen Spender writes below, in words that could also apply to the others:

> He used [thrown-in scientific terminology] with a certain effect of mysteriousness which communicated itself excitingly, as Milton uses the heathen Gods, with an intellectual awareness of what they signify and yet with a kind of abracadabra.[30]

Wells, Mitchell, MacDiarmid, Auden: a formidable combination of the self-assured and arrogant. Educative intent in their style might be argued for. Ezra Pound's Hugh Selwyn Mauberley was intended to send readers round the museums and galleries according to Donald Davie;[31] why should three out of these four not send people round the dictionaries? (Because the journey would be boring, perhaps?) Edwin Morgan looks to justify MacDiarmid's stunts with reference to Wordsworth's Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, where we read the following:

> If the labours of men of science should create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition and in the impressions we habitually receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at present [. . .]. The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed.[32]

Morgan sees this not merely as a manifesto for "acceptance" but also for for a "positive co-operation" in which the poet helps the world at large gain access to the scientific. He then optimistically explores MacDiarmid's inaccessible later poetry. The earlier poetry, such as "Empty Vessel", might be more fruitful, where a woman's love

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30 Stephen Spender, World Within World (London, 1951), p.56.

31 Donald Davie, "Ezra Pound's Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", in Boris Ford (ed.) Pelican Guide to English Literature (Harmondsworth, 1963), pp.315-29 (317).

32 Edwin Morgan "Poetry and Knowledge in MacDiarmid's Later Work" , in Essays (Cheadle, 1974), pp.203-13 (203).

for her dead child is counterpointed with bending light.[33] This light derives, according to Catherine Kerrigan, from Einstein's theory of General Relativity, light being influenced by gravity.[34] Gravity and other cosmic forces are compared with the woman's love for her child; a recent advance in scientific theory has here been impressively merged with human feeling.

Alternatively, a magisterial pseudo-detachment can be another effect of of the literary use of scientific theory. Valentine Cunningham has pertinent remarks about undergraduate Auden airily rising above the world's problems with some offhand psychology;[35] Mitchell certainly invokes detachment with his investigator-figure in the essays on Scotland:

> The investigator stands aside and views with care the high cheek-bones in the brachycephalic heads of the males, that singularly dis-harmonic head that is so singularly Aberdonian [. . .]. A strange fate haunts the Aberdonian woman. She cannot walk. Some go by with a duck-like waddle, some prance on squattering toes, some slouch with laggard steps. It is the Granite sidewalks responsible, the investigator concludes. (ScSc, p.248)

Perhaps we are meant to take this conclusion straight, or perhaps there are ironies or innuendoes at work which suggest that Aberdonian females show unique deformities, just as Aberdonian males have theirs. Mitchell is not alone: Francis Galton's "beauty map" classes women he meets in the streets of various cities as "attractive, indifferent or repellent", London doing best and Aberdeen worst.[36] Mitchell never goes this far, except to suggest that the women's most popular name ("Grizel") reminds him of a large polar bear. Other heavy insults made in the classificatory manner are often put into the hearts and mouths of Mitchell's surrogates. Ewan in Grey Granite believes the keelies to have "disharmonic heads and moron brains" (p.70), and the degree of

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33 MacDiarmid, "Empty Vessel", in Complete Poems (London, 1978), p.66. "Vessel" first published 1926.

34 Catherine Kerrigan, Whaur Extremes Meet (Edinburgh, 1983), p.71.

35 Cunningham, pp.194-95.

36 Galton, p.316.

authorial commitment to this is unclear. The remark recalls the nineteenth- and early twentieth- century pseudo-science of phrenology, which tried to define the characteristics of "born criminals" by categorising the shapes of their heads and bodies.[37]

Mitchell's interest in classifying physical head-shape parallels his need to classify hair colour, although the assumed scientific air in the former case gives way to one merely of popular prejudice and speculation. Many novelists, of course, make hair colour the subject of comment in some way or other, sometimes tied up with race: George Eliot, for example, introduces Adam Bede in the following way:

> In his tall stalwartness Adam Bede was a Saxon, and justified his name; but the jet-black hair, made more noticeable by its with the light paper cap, and the keen glance of the dark eyes that shone from under strongly marked, prominent and mobile eyebrows, indicated a mixture of Celtic blood.[38]

The difference from this in Mitchell is that hair is related, or at least implied to relate, to character to a greater extent. Virtually everyone in the Scottish fiction is designated a shade: in Sunset Song one could cite Tony the daftie, Long Rob, John Guthrie, Jean Guthrie, Will, Chris, Ewan, McIvor, and the Rev. Gibbon. Red hair tends to denote a fiery, angry personality -- as with John Guthrie -- or, in the The Speak of the Mearns, with Keith Stratoun's mother (see pp.48,49,58,66 in the latter novel). Dark hair seems also to define certain characters' natures: in the case of Malcom Maudslay's mother, "You must not think of her as bored and apathetic. She was quick and patient and dark." (TD, p.20) Ewan, similarly, is "swift and dark" in Cloud Howe (p.211). Why darkness should appear to connote swiftness is not

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[37] See Cesare Lombroso, Criminal Man: According to the Classification of Cesare Lombroso (New York, 1911), especially pp.5-24. He was an influence on Max Nordau, self-appointed guardian of non-degenerate civilisation in Degeneration (London, 1895). Nordau too writes of "asymmetry of face and cranium" in "degenerates" (p.18).

[38] George Eliot, Adam Bede (New York, 1961; first published 1858), p.18.

explained, but left vaguely to one's racial imagination. Blondness tends to denote the good and the beautiful; Long Rob is blond and Chris nearly blond in Sunset Song. Predictable associations are made between such characters and the Golden Age; Rob is specifically compared to a Viking (SS, pp. 19, 151). The Vikings' ancestry is speculated on by Mitchell's guru Elliot Smith:

> The Cro-Magnon people were exceptionally tall and robustly built, and the possibility suggests itself whether they were the ancestors of the Nordic race, who were pushed north by the inrush of the Mediterraneans.[39]

Elliot Smith and his Diffusionists prefer blondes. The Cro-Magnards (the approved race in Three Go Back -- see "Rest of the World" chapter for more discussion of Mitchell's golden super-race) seem to be a key un-civilised people in Mitchell's version of history.

Smith, of course, does more speculative pre-history than history as such. This may be glorified by its being conducted by a scientist (who began as an anatomist) in the case of Smith, who probes a historical record of a kind, highly incomplete but highly compelling. There is in a sense a purity here not available to later history, because while the best of revolutionary science is at work on pre-history, there is little escaping the fact that history "proper" is that of civilisation and is therefore subject to civilisation's biases. Mitchell is thus highly uncomfortable living with history. There is, however, little alternative.

4 Civilisation's Records

> They were burning out the nineteenth century: Victorian England, Victorian Europe, cant a religion, smugness a creed, gods in whiskers and morals in stays [. . .]. That fire went up with the crackling of crinolines and bustles, brothels and bethels. It screamed with the agony of murdered children in Midland factories, sighed and glimmered in a world of such pious belching as no century had ever seen. It flared on a gaseous literature and an idiot art, sank and seethed and roared again with the fuel of gutter dreams and palace spires. (TD, p. 4)

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[39] Smith, p.177.

For Mitchell, most of the art, literature and history of the century preceding his own has to end in the bonfire: this is possibly modelled on the Beltane festival in Wells's In The Days of the Comet, in which most of the houses and factories, architecture and machinery, are reduced to ashes on order to rebuild and create a new civilisation.[40] The "Aberdeen" essay looks at a different period and rolls up its sleeves for the corresponding demolition job:

> Great sections of the older streets and wynds stand condemned [. . .] with antique names that move the antiquarian to suitable regrets when he considers their fate -- the Upper Kirkgate, the Nether Kirkgate, the Gallowgate, the Guestrow. But I have no such regrets. Those gates to kirk and gallows: you think of a foetid sixteenth century stench and the staring mobs [. . .] and you turn, with relief and a new resolve, to face the glinting, flinting structures that tower new-built up Union Street. (ScSc, p.250)

Mitchell's sentiments in The Thirteenth Disciple and "Aberdeen" recur in Gay Hunter: when the views expressed through the medium of Gay Hunter, involving wholesale contempt for the old in general, are among his most wantonly vandalistic:

> Suddenly it seemed to her that it was not only the great and towering bestialities of that life that had been vile [. . .] but [. . .] old cottages and old couples seated in front of ivy-wreathed doors and old sweethearts and old loyalties and old hopes. Old! What a curse they had been in her world, the old and all the old things that they cherished! (GH, p.132)

Analogues to feelings such as this in the literary thirties can been seen with Valentine Cunningham's chapter "Too Old At Forty" about the thirties cult of poetic youth,[41] in which old men become despised and most of the decade's literary heavyweights seem to be under twenty-five in 1930. Mitchell's stance will also recall the iconoclasm of early Modernism: architectural as well as literary. Before Joyce's and Eliot's sophisticated attempts to counterpoint the ancient and the modern, we find Marinetti, leader of the Italian Futurists, proposing in 1909 that he and his friends

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40 Wells, In The Days of the Comet (London, 1906), pp.287-88.

41 Cunningham, pp.106-54.

> will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind. [. . .] We want to free the land of its smelly gangrene of professors, archaeologists, ciceroni and all antiquarians.[42]

T.E. Hulme, early theorist of Modernism, writes on similar (though more specific) lines, claiming to be in favour of "the destruction of all verse more than twenty years old".[43] (Carey's Intellectuals and the Masses, predicated on the idea that fascism/ elitism and a worship of the masterpieces of High Art go hand in hand, fails to address the problem of the existence of Marinetti and his kind.)[44] John Garland in Mitchell's Stained Radiance, also in favour of radical modernity, attempts to trump High Modernism itself by championing Wells as advanced, in his sense of novelistic purpose, in contrast to Joyce, Woolf and Lawrence, who, despite "lack of purpose" in their novels,

> believe themselves up-to-date, Neo-Georgian, yet in novel-writing [are] a generation behind the times. [. . .] They don't realise that the novel of portrait and manners is a dead dog. (SR, pp. 87-88)

Permanent revolution in literature, then, is being advocated, along with equivalent movements in science and, as we shall see, history. Unfortunately, literary history's verdict is that Mitchell got it wrong. Wells would appear to have lost the debate with Henry James about showing and telling in Art, his later novels remaining substantially unappreciated.[45]

Mitchell's iconoclasm in Stained Radiance got him into no real trouble from contemporaries; neither did the will-to-destroy in evidence in Gay Hunter, The

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[42] F.T. Marinetti, Futurist Manifesto in Le Figaro (Paris, 1909).

[43] Hulme, quoted in Michael Levenson, A Genealogy of Modernism (Cambridge, 1984), p.78.

[44] See Carey, p.208.

[45] The debate with James has been given various treatments; one such is in the opening chapter of J.R. Hammond, H. G. Wells and the Modern Novel (London, 1988).

Thirteenth Disciple or "Aberdeen". What did was the strikingly anti-patriotic passage in "Glasgow" in which he ranks all national history and culture as profitless in comparison to present needs. If it comes to a choice between a free, culturally lively independent Scotland which includes rank poverty or an unfree Scotland which does not, he would choose the latter:

> For the cleansing of that horror, if cleanse it they could, I would welcome the English in suzerainty over Scotland till the end of time. I would welcome the end of Braid Scots and Gaelic, our culture, our history, our nationhood under the heels of a Chinese army of occupation if it could cleanse the Glasgow slums, give a surety of food and play [. . .] to those people of the abyss. (ScSc, p.141)

This Chinese fantasy was greeted with disdain among his fellow Scots, among them Neil Gunn, who sees the occupying army idea as a "fantastical irrelevance". The Scots alone, he claims, could sort out their own problems, if given a genuine chance to do so.[46] Leaving aside the accuracy of this speculation, Mitchell's words in Scottish Scene should be taken with more than a pinch of salt. They form part of a colourful polemic against nationalism and immediately bring to mind his quite different stance in Sunset Song where he mourns deeply the loss of a culture and a language, climaxing with Colquohoun's funeral oration quoted earlier. Mitchell does reject certain kinds of history, such as the gutted, sanitised version in the Museum at Duncairn:

> Plaster-cast stuff of the Greek antiques, Discobolus, blowsily mammalian Venus, Pallas Athene [. . .]. [T]here was a cast of Trajan, good head; Caesar -- the Caesar they said wasn't Caesar. Why not a head of Spartacus? Or a plaque of the dripping line of crosses that manned the Appian way with slaves [. . .] or a statuary group of a Roman slave being fed to fishes? (GG, p.72)

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[46] Neil Gunn, "Tradition and Magic in the Work of Lewis Grassic Gibbon", Scots Magazine (October, 1938), pp. 28-35.

Mitchell's interest lies in writing a people's history, in a mode akin to the more recent work of E.P. Thompson.[47] When writing in "Antique Scene" about the "phantoms" and "false faces" of Jacobite Royalty and so on that normally dominate accounts of Scottish history, he argues:

> Behind the posturings of these poltergeists are the lives of millions of the lowly who wiped the sweats of toil from browned faces and smelt the pour of waters by the Mull of Kintyre and the winds of autumn in the Grampian Haughs (ScSc, p.19)

In this brief account, he can only gesture speculatively towards ordinary Scots before moving on to represent history with Wallace and Bruce in what he believes to be their proper places. In the Quair, however, he does achieve a kind of people's history; the prefaces to Sunset Song and Cloud Howe filling in the background centuries of Kinraddie and Segget as the lower orders might see them before an account of the contemporary or near-contemporary situations of the ordinary inhabitants. The question of the Quair's perspective is, of course, more complicated than this, as we shall see in both the following chapter and chapter six. There are, in addition to the novels' proems, further attempts to invoke past centuries through the use of stone monuments.

A Covenanters' grave from 1685 features prominently in Chris and Ewan's visit to Dunnottar Castle in Sunset Song. The inscription on the stone is reproduced on the page (126); here is an abbreviated version:

> HERE : LYES : IOHN : STOT : IAMES :
> AITCHISON : IAMES : RUSSELL : AND :
> WILLIAM : BROUN : [. . .] WHO : ALL : DIED
> : PRISONERS : IN : DUNNOTTAR : CASTLE :
> ANNO : 1685 : FOR : THEIR : ADHERENCE :
> TO THE : WORD : OF : GOD : AND :
> SCOTLANDS COVENANTED : WORK : OF :
> REFORMATION REV : II CH 12 VERSE

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[47] See E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (London, 1963).

It lists the known names of the dead, mentions that the names of others are not known, and winds up with a political slogan and a reference to the Book of Revelation. Chris's reaction: "There the Covenanting folk had screamed and died while the gentry dined and danced in their lithe, warm halls"; she finds "that hatred of rulers and gentry a flame in her heart". (p.126) This kind of sentiment about the Covenanters appears elsewhere: they are "the advance guard of the common folk" in Grey Granite (p.154) and feature also in Scottish Scene (p.33). Walter Scott's view in Old Mortality -- that they were as much or more to do with fanatical religious sectarianism than social justice -- has found favour with numerous historians since, including Michael Lynch.[48]

Interpretations of the Covenanters such as these notwithstanding, their grave stands as a key historical link with ordinary folk for Chris, and as a spur to basic emotion. It is second in this only to the standing stones above the loch, to which she runs when in deep thought or in trouble. Indeed she thinks over the entirety of her story in the company of the stones, which are "memorials to the Golden Age" in Douglas Young's words, although "only as reminders of the first bringers of civilization who destroyed it". The Great War, remembered by the four dead soldiers' names being carved onto the stones,

> marks the final triumph of those forces of civilization which made their first encroachments with the early invaders. It is fitting that the stones which are a memorial to that first invasion should also be a memorial to the final defeat of the Pictish folk of the golden Age.[49]

Simultaneously the records of civilisation and of the Golden Age, they stand for the beginning of history. The symbolic ambivalence of these stones necessarily blurs what

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[48] Walter Scott, Old Mortality (Edinburgh, 1816);
Michael Lynch, Scotland: A New History (London, 1992), pp.264, 293-95.

[49] Young, p. 90.

meaning we might see in connection with Chris's visits to them, and is consequently rich, in contrast generally to Mitchell's other, cruder symbols we see elsewhere (Spartacus crucified, alongside a mention of Christ, for instance) where a simple symbolic message is involved. The ambivalence implied towards the standing stones marks Mitchell's generally deeply divided attitude to history.

Conclusion

Ideally, for Mitchell, neither history or civilisation should have started. Both have, however, and are inescapable: it is necessary to understand where history came from and where it is going -- assuming that an end to history is not imminent; that war will not reduce the world to rubble. For the side of Mitchell incarnate in Grey Granite's Ewan Tavendale, historical knowledge appears to involve a belief in Marxist dialectical forces culminating in approaching proletarian revolution. Mitchell's Diffusionism, more overtly dreamy and near-mystical, seems to have an on-off relationship with such forces as these.

The impulse to edit, or rather erase undesirable elements out of history is a powerful one in The Thirteenth Disciple and in "Glasgow", as we have seen earlier; the apprehension of what history means, though, is nevertheless essential. Understanding history implies vigorously contesting interpretations disseminated by the reactionary intellectual monopolies Mitchell believes to be controlling this discipline and others. One must contest history; one must historicise culture: the tasks he sets himself are always ambitious. There are further struggles necessary in the sciences related to history, such as archaeology and anthropology, in which Mitchell claims to specialise. Out-civilising civilisation is therefore required, however much Mitchell might dislike this form of words. Meta-civilising Scotland suggests itself as one possibility on Mitchell's agenda, and the next chapter considers the question of whether it is possible, or for that matter worth doing.

Chapter 2: Scotland

Introduction

Anthologies of literature about Scotland or particular parts of it are a regular feature of the Scottish publishing scene. Recent examples would be Grampian Hairst or The Land Out There.[1] Mitchell's work features in both of these: we find Chris's wedding from Sunset Song, and cosy passages from the essay "The Land". Worthy as they are in their way, celebrating what their editors find valuable about Scotland, such anthologies run the risk of serving up merely unprovocative and unchallenging material. The two mentioned above combine with Ian Munro's sentimental image (and the presentation to be found at the present Grassic Gibbon centre in Arbuthnott) that casts Mitchell as basically a clay-plodding Mearnsman to suggest that he is, at heart, an honest lover of the Scottish scene and character; even a Scottish patriot.

This picture has occasionally been challenged by Marxists such as Keith Dixon and Michael McGrath, who have both stressed Mitchell's Communist internationalism over and above his Scottish patriotism.[2] Their work, however, does not go far enough, leaving out the degree to which Mitchell denigrates or marginalises Scotland and praises his adopted country, England. The next two chapters will contend that Mitchell's regard for England and the English has been substantially undervalued by quasi-nationalist and Marxist alike, who have decided at certain points in reading the essays and novels to ignore the evidence; furthermore, one strong schema that may be derived from the admittedly confusing and contradictory explorations of Scottish identity in the Quair and Scottish Scene involves Scotland being a good place to be

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1 Cuthbert Graham and William Donaldson (eds.), Grampian Hairst (Aberdeen, 1982), pp.3,46; George Bruce and Frank Rennie (eds.), The Land out There (Aberdeen, 1991), pp.2,128.

2 Dixon, pp.257-75; McGrath, pp.200-08.

dead in, or to have had a childhood in, but not to be resident in during the 1930s. What we have available to us of the incomplete The Speak of the Mearns -- an opening section combining an introduction (like Sunset Song's) to the village unworthies with the description of a sensitive protagonist's childhood -- suggests a movement along similar lines: Scotland as a place to think back to, as powerful emotion recollected in relative tranquillity. Mitchell lived in Welwyn from 1929 onwards, making brief, occasional visits to Scotland which were partly to see his family and partly to find copy for further writing.[3]

1 Potted Histories, Potted Identities

As we have seen, Mitchell has periodic urges to get rid of written history, yet is greatly interested in the subject, especially when it concerns Scotland. As well as the preludes to Sunset Song, Cloud Howe and The Speak of the Mearns, and the story of Mungo Park in Niger, and the essay "Antique Scene", plans were underway to write one book on Wallace and another on the Covenanters.[4] Resonances from the Scottish past on top of this would include the numerous ghosts who make appearances in the Quair. One might think that in some of this material somewhere there would be a strong, outspoken attack on the English. This does not happen; in "Antique Scene", his major venture into outlining Scottish history, there is much revelry in describing the insurrection of Wallace's Army of the Commons against Edward I's rule, but it is noticeable that he spends time making socialistic capital out of the affair -- contrasting the enthusiastic Commons with the "laggard nobles" (ScSc, p.28) -- and touting Diffusionism into the bargain, invoking

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[3] Munro, pp.122-32.

[4] See NLS MS 26059 (Wallace); MS 26060 (Covenanters).

> the cry of the wind in the hair of freemen in that ancient life of the Golden Age, the play of the same wind on the banners of Wallace when he marshalled his schiltrouns at Falkirk. (ScSc, p.36)

As a result of the rare, long-past triumphs of Wallace and Bruce, the English have been characterised as cowardly in the schoolrooms of Leekan (Thirteenth Disciple) and Kinraddie (Sunset Song). Mitchell's irony at the naïveté of such a characterisation is pronounced:

> They were told to [. . .] roll the letter "r", and to avoid the elision of aitches, otherwise they might be mistaken for Englishmen -- poor, cowardly, excitable people whom Scotsmen had chased across the border again and again. (TD, p.29)

Mitchell knows better; there has been little effective chasing across the border, aside from ineffective Jacobite adventures, since the accession of James I/VI when the "long process of barbarisation of the Scots mind" began ("Antique Scene", p.32). He implies himself to be on the side of what was Scottish culture, bitterly commenting that presently

> it was understood to be a shameful thing to be a Scotsman, to make Scots poetry, to be subject to Scots law, to be an inhabitant of the Northern half of the island. (p.32)

But is this anyone's fault? Perhaps not as such. In the very introduction to "Antique Scene", Mitchell argues:

> That barbarisation is a synonym for Anglicisation is no adverse reflection on the great English culture. Again and again, in the play of the historic forces, a great civilisation imposed on an alien and lesser has compassed that nation's downfall. (p.123)

In their geography and their history, then, the Scots have been unlucky. The Scottish sense of national shame, initiated by the movement of James' court to London, realises itself in a number of forms in the present tense of the Quair. In

Kinraddie, the would-be English-speaking Gordon family is singed out for its aspirations, and ridiculed by Long Rob. Mistress Gordon speaks of her daughter: "*And the specialist in Aberdeen, said about Maggie Jean* --" and Long Rob's alternative version goes: "*When I took my boar up to Edinburgh, he up and said, Mr Rob, this is a gey unusual boar, awful delicate* [. . .]." (SS, p.21) at which she forgets her English and calls him "an orra tink brute". There is confusion for Chris in Segget when she cannot win, whatever register she uses: "You needn't fash" is interpreted as coming from "a common-like bitch"; the English equivalent means she is "putting on airs" (CH, p.15). The Segget voice, though, knows it should scorn Alec Hogg for calling his lass his "feeungsay" (p.61).

The distinctions that work in Segget do not in Duncairn. Grey Granite presents us with a babel of different registers. The clerk John Cushnie's corresponding use of "feeungsay" goes, as far as we know, without spoken comment. He tries to speak English at Ma Cleghorn's breakfast table: "Will you pass the cruet please? I'm in a gey hurry" (GG p.13). No one points out what he is doing wrong here either, although Chris notices it. Cushnie, no doubt inspired by his upwardly-mobile girlfriend, eschews the "awful Scotch words" of the farmers who come into town. Of the other boarding-house guests, Mr Piddle, journalist for the *Daily Runner*, punctuates his journalese ("*Her husband, the late Minister of Segget"*) with an irritating "*Hee Hee*"; lower-middle class typist Ena Lyon uses the slang of "talky" and "Catchy Choon" and old Miss Murgatroyd, of the Morningside "Such Fine!" and "Awful Broad" species shows complete confidence in her Anglo-Scots Morningside dialect, now self-evident and natural. Scottish Scene catalogues more linguistic betrayal. The essay on Ramsay MacDonald dwells on his embarrassed and embarrassing attempts to shed "the rougher cut lines of his Scottishness", by wearing a top hat and using "a trilling diapason of consonants and false vowels" in order to cut a better figure at Court and at

Westminster in "The Wrecker".[5]

MacDiarmid enters this discussion inevitably. His answer to all the problems of Scottish identity is declaimed by his Drunk Man in 1926: to "be yersel's". But as MacDiarmid goes on to admit,

> To be yersel's -- and to mak that worth bein'.
> Nae harder job to mortals has been gi'en.[6]

Quite right: what it would involve for bastardised Morningside's Miss Murgatroyd to be her true self could be debated long and hard. What if characteristically Scots traits are Ramsay MacDonald's "hazy inability to grasp at the flinty actualities of existence" (p.97), his foisting of "antique Scotticisms on quite alien essentials" (p.98), his being "engaged in lifting sentences piecemeal from some super-abacus frame and arranging them in a genteel pattern" and his indulgence in "genuflection at the shrine of words" (p.95)? Those who are characteristically Scottish seem, for Mitchell, to possess a largely negative set of attributes. Since 1603, it is implied, the Scots have been highly successful in developing inferiority complexes and have, not so successfully, tried hard to be English; it is characteristically Scottish to try to be English. In order to avoid the wreckage of the Scottish present (as MacDiarmid sees it) and to approach a truer self-identity, Scots are obliged to delve way back into history to understand what their nation has lost, and then to set about changing, even creating themselves in the light of what they find:

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[5] Owen Dudley Edwards, incidentally, claims it as it significant that Mitchell should write of the Scottish scene's "wrecker" (MacDonald) and MacDiarmid of its "builder" (C. H. Douglas) in "Prose and Polemic", in P.H. Scott and A .C. Davis (eds.), The Age of MacDiarmid (Edinburgh, 1980), pp.238-260 (259).

[6] Hugh MacDiarmid, "A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle", in Complete Poems, pp.81-167 (107).

I dinna say that bairns alane
Are true love's task -- a sairer task
Is aiblins to create oorsels
As we can be -- it's that I ask.[7]

Mitchell is less optimistic about this possibility than MacDiarmid. Both, though, would agree that Scottish history has been romanticised to an appalling degree, full of "fictitious faces", as suggested in the opening lines of "Antique Scene". Several of the faces of history projected by Mitchell himself have, of course, been criticised for being on the fictitious side, particularly as he relies on Graham's exaggerated account of an ecclesiastical reign of terror in his Social History of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century to reinforce his polemic in the "Religion" essay, which also labels all Scots as horribly sexually repressed.[8] Douglas Young points out in his thesis the dubiousness of Mitchell's second-hand approach to history,[9] and Beveridge and Turnbull attack Graham and other historians (including the much more recent T.C. Smout) in The Eclipse of Scottish Culture for failing to steer away from acceptance of the "interiorised inferiorism" that marks much Scottish cultural self-analysis.[10] The Eclipse puts Tom Nairn in the same category due to his polemic against "tartanry", a polemic which, as they see it, ultimately goes too far and, brands almost every aspect of Scottish culture as laughably nostalgic and twee.[11]

Mitchell has Nairn's readiness to see tartan and charge at it:

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7 MacDiarmid, p.113.

8 Henry Grey Graham, Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1899).

9 Young, thesis, p.78.

10 Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, The Eclipse of Scottish Culture (Edinburgh, 1990), pp.17-18.

11 Beveridge and Turnbull, p.58.

> It will profit Glasgow's hundred and fifty thousand slum-dwellers so much to know that they are being starved and brutalised by Labour Exchanges and Public Assistance Committees staffed exclusively by Gaelic-Speaking, haggis-eating Scots in saffron kilts and tongued brogues, full of such typical Scottish ideas as those which kept men chained as slaves in the Fifeshire mines. (ScSc, p.146)

> I like the thought of a Scots Republic with Scots Border Guards in saffron kilts [. . .]. I like the thought of Miss Wendy Wood leading a Scots Expeditionary Force down to Westminster to reclaim the Scone Stone [. . .]. I like the thought of a Scots kingdom with Mr Compton Mackenzie Prime Minister to some disinterred Jacobite royalty, and all the Scots intellectuals settled out on the land on thirty-acre crofts [. . .]. I like the thought of the ancient Scots aristocracy revived and set in order by Mr. George Blake, the ephor of the people. (ScSc, p.140)

Passages such as this may be variously interpreted. Murray Pittock takes one idiosyncratic approach in support of his thesis about Jacobitism in Scotland:

> Even [. . .] Gibbon, himself no nationalist, was able to say: "I like the thought of a Scots Catholic Kingdom with Mr Compton Mackenzie Prime Minister [. . .] ". Grassic Gibbon, though he had little time for Jacobitism, regarded Charles Edward as a Scottish patriot.[12]

There is some evidence for Pittock's last remark. In "Antique Scene" every decent Scotsman was, at least at first, an "enthusiast and a partisan" for the '45. Charles himself, though, was "of no importance" while Scotland's nationhood was. But as for Mitchell's thoughts on tartan in the above passage, he does not "like" in the sense of "wish for". He can only be read here as liking simply the idea and no more; the idea of particular carnivalesque images, used to the effect of grotesque caricatures of Scottish nationalism, particularly of the right-wing kind. Fascism and tartan are certainly not the answer to the problems of identity. Might literature, though, be at least part of that answer?

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[12] Murray Pittock The Invention of Scotland (London, 1991), p.139.

2 The Scottish Tradition in Literature

For Mitchell, the Scottish writer looking for national identity has particular duties: not to take cues from England, nor to fetishise the flotsam and jetsam of Scottish history, nor to fetishise his nation's literary past. "Nearly every Scots writer of the past", he claims in "Literary Lights", has been "incurably second-rate" (p.197). Never particularly interested in Henryson and the Makars ("whoever they were")[13] aside from a perfunctory reference in "Antique Scene" to the reign of James V, he shows more concern with the predicament of post-Union writers, including Burns and Scott now and again, and his own contemporaries in "Literary Lights", as we shall see in a moment.

That essay is well-known for its description of the Scot writing in English who has "translated himself" (p.196) or tried to, while there is no adequate counterpart for the original Scots. A combination of linguistic unease engendering formal English and of typically Scottish emotional repression is a potent one, and affects writing and speech alike. In his life of Mungo Park, Mitchell labours the point that Park's Travels shows "the flat genteel writing that was to the taste of his period" (Niger, p.259). Mitchell has also sifted through "those stilted obsequious letters that guised his soul in epistolary matters as the cold voice did in oral communication" (p.263). Park and his good friend Walter Scott are surmised to have talked in "the stilted jargon of their times" (p.266). The point about the inadequacy of Park's language is also made through a wearying series of parodic Anglo-Scotticisms in the narrative, such as the following:

> [. . .] diversified in its solemnities by copious drafts of mead. (p.40)
> The outraged husband, or an agent, would hie himself off [. . .]. (p.60)
> [. . .] urging forward the refractory ass. (p.70)

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13 Letter to Helen Cruickshank, 18 September 1933, NLS MS 26109.

> And that that haughty spirit suffered in the interview is by no means clear. (p.119)
> The country took to itself a greener and more fertile aspect. (p.163)
> Mungo [. . .] had the four carpenters attested (it seems somewhat against their will) that they might come under the same discipline as the others. (p.278)

Mitchell is keen to explain objectively why Park was such a good friend of Scott's:

> They had minds of a singular similarity in many ways: both in most matters were rigid conservatives and conventionalists; they had the same barrenness of creative talent, the same admiration for the second-hand and shoddy in literature and art. (Niger, p.266)

This attack on Scott is not unique. Take this, for example, from "Religion":

> A typical Episcopalian was Sir Walter Scott -- shallow and sedulous, incurably second-rate, incapable (so had his spirit-stuff been moulded) of either delineating the essentials of human character or apprehending the essentials of human motivation. (ScSc, p.324)

Though these attacks have an element of sincerity, they are made largely to upset and provoke. Mitchell attacks Scottish icons because they are icons, Robert Burns not least. His qualified admiration for the poet is shown in this letter to the Mearns Leader:

> Burns lived a tormented life in a land which treats poets and genuinely creative writers as criminal lunatics -- until they are safely dead [. . .]. Scotland proceeded to mummify Burns' corpse and set it up in a heather shrine for the worship of the dull and the base and the flabbily loquacious. In life he hated and despised such people: in death they hold him captive and cover away his angry pity for the common man under the blether of an annual alcoholic emotionalism.[14]

On the other hand, the Quair reads in an anti-Burns way. As Ian Campbell points out, there is no Burns night anywhere in the trilogy; all we have are parodies.[15] Pooty in Sunset Song recites his "weeeee ssss-leek-ed ccccccowering TIMROUS BEASTIE"

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[14] Letter to Mearns Leader, 8 Feb 1934.

[15] Ian Campbell, Lewis Grassic Gibbon, p.89.

with a continual stutter (p.22), while in Cloud Howe Ake Ogilvie tells jokes about his lechery and drunkenness and others invoke the Bard with breathtaking fatuousness:

> An ancestor, like, of the Hoggs, Rabbie Burns. *A man's a man for a' that*, he wrote, and by that he meant that poor folk of their kind should steer well clear of the gentry and such, not try to imitate them at all, and leave them to manage the country's affairs. (p.179)

Neither the icons of the past nor Scots who have written bad English are spared. MacDiarmid would have approved of most of this (excepting the attack on alcohol); the main difference between Scottish Scene's collaborators comes in their view of the twentieth century. MacDiarmid believes that some sort of Scottish Renaissance is underway, while for Mitchell the best contemporary Scottish writers have improved on much of their miserable recent past, and impress him even, but are nevertheless generally classifiable as part of the cultural scene of "Scotshire" (ScSc p.200) rather than anything more radically un-English. Modern Scottish writers have failed. "Literary Lights" attacks the idea that a work of "Scottish Literature" can be so classified simply by virtue of its being written by a native Scot. Compton Mackenzie and John Buchan do not qualify for the club Mitchell has in mind; they are not even particularly serious about the country as a discrete entity. Furthermore, even those who are serious will fail if Braid Scots does not figure as a substantial part of their medium. Willa Muir, Naomi Mitchison and Neil Gunn fall, for Mitchell, into this category. He does not accuse them for betraying their birthright, the crime of John Cushnie in Grey Granite and Ramsay MacDonald in "The Wrecker"; Mitchell is more interested in pointing out the way that Braid Scots, language of "bed and board and street and plough" (ScSc, p.196) presently has a fundamentally un-literary status before a writer puts pen to paper. Muir, Mitchison and Gunn are more victims than perpetrators of cultural crime. There are three successes that he considers, although MacDiarmid's work is a noticeably hit-and-miss affair, Lewis Spence draws on a

conspicuously dated linguistic register, and Grassic Gibbon does it all by halves in his continual compromises with Standard English. These three writers are to be seen distinctly as rarities. While in an ideal world Scotland would produce its own literature, strongly differentiated from that of the English, in practice it does not. The force of the essay's attack is entirely against Scotland rather than England (excepting the historical footnote at the end, concerning the suppression of Gaelic by the English). In an aside to Helen Cruickshank about Scottish Scene, Mitchell compares his own literary attitudes with those of MacDiarmid and reveals a frank interest in the English publishing scene, where quality tells:

> He talks about the Scots literary renaissance; I say, there isn't any such thing -- merely a dodge on the part of second-rate Scots who can't attract a sufficiently large English public.[16]

In "Glasgow", Mitchell declares that he would rather be "an expatriate writing novels in Persian about the Cape of Good Hope than a member of a homogeneous literary cultus [. . .] prosing eternally on one plane" (pp.146-7). The extent to which Mitchell is describing the whole of the Scottish Renaissance in throwaway lines such as this is unclear. What is clear in "Literary Lights" is that Scotland, as elsewhere in Scottish Scene, is backward and should be catching up faster:

> At such rate of progress among the Anglo-Scots one may guess that in fifty years or so a Scots Virginia Woolf will astound the Scottish Scene, a Scots James Joyce electrify it. To expect contemporary experimentation from the Anglo-Scots themselves appears equivalent to expecting a Central African savage in possession of a Birmingham Kite to prove capable of inventing a helicopter. (p.197)

The fifty-year gap recalls James Joyce's vexation about the asynchronicity of Irish history with that of the rest of Europe:

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16 Letter to Helen Cruickshank, see p.48, n.13.

> In time, perhaps there will be a gradual reawakening of the Irish conscience, and perhaps four or five centuries after the Diet of Worms, we shall see an Irish monk throw off his frock, run off with some nun and proclaim in a loud voice the end of the coherent absurdity that was Catholicism and the beginning of the incoherent absurdity that is Protestantism.[17]

For the Scottish exile Mitchell, however, his own nation's backwardness, particularly in relation to England, is the persistent theme, and a fifty-year gap is considered quite bad enough.

3 The Modern Scot and Scottish Scene

What of that tiny Scottish minority which has made efforts to engage and keep up with the twentieth century avant-garde, yet claims to be Nationalist? The Modern Scot, a quarterly journal running between 1930 and 1936, may be characterised as one project on these lines, albeit an unusual one in its defence of Catholicism. But this journal in its turn attracts further scorn in the "Literary Lights" and "Glasgow" essays. The editorial in the magazine's first issue defines its position on Scottish culture and politics:

> Whatever lasting benefits Scotland will receive will come through the re-establishment of an independent government and of an individual Scottish culture [. . .]. Both the vernacular and the Gaelic can still effectively be used as national media of expression.[18]

A dramatic reviewer wishes to "purge the stage for all time of Barrie and Moffatt", and an "On the Continent" section covers events in France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, and Norway.[19] The second number and subsequent ones contain attacks on Burns Clubs and the Kailyard.[20] There are contributions from Mitchell's friends such

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17 Richard Ellman, James Joyce (Oxford, 1983), p.258.

18 The Modern Scot (Spring, 1930), p.5.

19 ibid., pp.51,52.

20 ibid. (Summer, 1930), p.37.

as MacDiarmid (more from him, in fact, than anyone else) and Linklater, and others whom Mitchell praises such as William Soutar. One would have thought that he might have had some time for the periodical given its attempts at a combination of Cosmopolitanism and the encouragement of authentic Scottish writing at the expense of the shoddy and clichéd.

Yet Mitchell has no time for it. His lengthy dismissal deserves to be quoted in full:

> Owned and edited by one of those genial Englishmen in search of a revolution who have added to the gaiety of nations from Ireland to Uganda, The Modern Scot has set itself, strictly within the English tradition, to out-English the English. As one who on a lonely road doth walk with fear and dread, very conscious of the frightful fiend who close behind doth tread, it marches always a full yard ahead of extremist English opinion -- casting the while an anxious backward glance. It decries the children of "naturalism" with a praiseworthy but unnatural passion, championing in their place, with a commendable care for pathology, the idiot offspring begat on the modern literary scene in such numbers from the incestuous unions of Strindberg and Dr. Freud. It is eclectic to quite an obscure degree, is incapable of an article that does not quote either Proust or Paul Einzig, and raises an approving voice in praise of the joyous, if infantile tauromachic obsessions of Mr Roy Campbell. Its motif-note, indeed, is literary Fascism -- to the unimpassioned, if astounded, eye it would seem as if all the Fascist undergraduates of Scotland were seeking to relieve themselves of a diarrhoetic Johnsonese in the appropriate privy of The Modern Scot. The entire being of the periodical, however, is rather an exhibitory, or sanitary, exercise, than a contributing factor towards authentic experimentation. (pp.197-98)

There is some justification for Mitchell's tirade. The Modern Scot sponsors Fascism: the reviewer Grant Duff can call Mussolini "a great political genius" and praise "the immense progress made by Italy under Fascism".[21] Editor J. H. Whyte (actually an American)[22] praises the "vigour" of South African right winger Roy Campbell's "thought", suggests that "real poets" such as Campbell are "few and far between", and

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21 ibid. (Spring, 1932), p.35.

22 See Alan Bold, Hugh MacDiarmid (London, 1988), p.257.

claims that there is "no better man" around doing Campbell's job.[23] In 1931 a review of a Wyndham Lewis book states that "we [. . .] being good Nationalists, are very interested in Hitlerism."[24] A little later, Whyte can qualify such interest severely: "Hitlerism and Fascism" are "a menace to the peace of the world"[25] -- although he can write blandly of the Jews being "seriously inconvenienced" and apparently little more by Action Française and the National Socialists.[26] In 1934 the Free Man sees a Mitchell attack on Whyte's book about Scottish art in which numerous assertions are made about national spirit and the benefits of its fostering by Fascism.[27] (Hugh MacDiarmid had, incidentally, already been on the Fascism bandwagon, having set out his "Programme for a Scottish Fascism" in 1923.)[28]

The Modern Scot's continental eclecticism does have a gauche over-earnestness about it, although this is less ruinous than Mitchell implies. The magazine is not completely dogmatic, despite his treatment of it as such; while it gives a great deal of space to the supporters of Douglasism, an anti- Social Credit article is allowed in as well, as is a further letter by the same writer.[29] No doubt Mitchell hates the Modern Scot partly because of its espousal of the Douglas scheme, which he characterises as "that ingenious scheme for childbirth without pain, and -- even more intriguing -- without a child." (ScSc, p.139) There is also apparently an aesthetic side to Mitchell's

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23 Modern Scot (Winter, 1932), pp.343-34.

24 ibid. (Summer, 1931), p.176.

25 ibid. (Autumn, 1932), p.194.

26 ibid. (Spring, 1932), p.5.

27 Mitchell,"News of Battle: Queries for Mr Whyte", in The Free Man, 3 (17 March 1934), p.9.

28 Hugh MacDiarmid, "Programme for A Scottish Fascism", in Selected Prose (Manchester, 1992), pp.34-38. Originally in Scottish Nation, No.7, 19 June 1923.

29 For pro- Social Credit material, see Modern Scot of Spring, 1930, pp.20-24; Summer, 1931, pp.128-35; Winter, 1932, pp.351-53. For anti- Social Credit material, see Spring, 1931, pp.26-31; Autumn, 1931, pp.257-58.

hatred; he vituperates the Modern Scot's golden boy Adam Kennedy, whose serialised novel The Mourners is summarised as "the insanitary reactions to death of a Kelvingrove bourgeois" (ScSc, p.147).

There might be a case made for a momentary Nationalism being roused in Mitchell. The publication is (supposedly) "owned by an Englishman" and it aims to "out-English the English" (see block quotation above). Its stated aims on independence, though, are much more nationalist than Mitchell's own. The "English" charge seems more to be a calculated affront to the Modern Scot's self-justification. It cannot be charged either with ignoring Modernism or abandoning Braid Scots, so for one of his aesthetic criticisms Mitchell has to claim simply that it has gone too far down the line of the avant-garde. But there are reasons more personal than this: the pernicious organ has dared to criticise his beloved creations, Sunset Song and Cloud Howe. (Scottish Scene and then Grey Granite are to receive similar rough treatment in later issues.)[30]

The first of these novels is damned with faint praise: Gibbon is "richly endowed with the gifts of eye and ear to gather his material" but "fail[s] to make use of it". While it is "probably the best recent Scottish story of its kind", it "leaves the novel where it was thirty years ago".[31] Cloud Howe's reviewer condemns Gibbon more vehemently:

> Those persons who reckon Sunset Song a masterpiece [. . .] will also like Cloud Howe, for it is written in the same galumphing style as the earlier story, and with most of the same irritating mannerisms [. . .]. The experiment [re. vocabulary and rhythm] is tiresome [. . .] the medium does not afford the novelist the range he ought to require [. . .]. There is more to offer the student of country life between Stonehaven and the Grampians than to the reader who at this time of day expects from a novel some serious degree of literary sophistication.[32]

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30 ScSc review: Spring-Summer, 1934, pp.122-25; GG review: Winter, 1935, pp.302-03.

31 Modern Scot (Summer, 1932), p.250.

32 ibid. (Summer, 1933), p.157.

Gibbon's reactions to other criticism, recorded in Ian Munro's biography, suggest that he would have taken these remarks personally.[33] The Modern Scot's cardinal sin, perhaps, is to discount Mitchell as a major literary point of reference. Mitchell does not discount himself in this way. Self-reference is admittedly effaced or parodic in the Quair, the folk-voice telling the story apart from occasional learned comments. Gibbon the minister may be seen as Grassic Gibbon's verbose twin, and the farmer's wife whose son lives in London and writes horrible books (CH, p.173) has to be Lilias Mitchell, Leslie's mother.

Scottish Scene, however, is a different case. Both the essays on Glasgow and the Land quote Grassic Gibbon's "distant cousin, Mr James Leslie Mitchell" (a device borrowed from Wells' William Clissold)[34] to the extent of a generous paragraph in each instance. "Literary Lights" presents the magisterial view that "Lewis Grassic Gibbon" is one of the great white hopes of Scottish Literature alongside the book's co-author Hugh MacDiarmid. Equally brazenly, the "Newsreel" snippets (ScSc, pp.208-09) insist on a particular theme:

> Mr Gibbon must surely confess the distortion to his own heart.
>
> Rev W H Hamilton in The Scotsman.

> Our contributor holds it to be a sign of degeneracy when men of scholarship and great mental gifts stoop to such monkey-tricks with the language of Shakespeare and Milton [. . .].
>
> Mearns Leader

> It is the story of crofter life near Stonehaven; but it is questionable if the author, or authoress, is correct in the description of crofter girls' underclothing in that period.
>
> Fife Herald

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33 Munro, p.95.

34 Wells, The World of William Clissold (London, 1926), p.716.

The Grassic Gibbon-reviewing Kirriemuir Free Press, the Paisley Express, and the Glasgow Herald are also represented. As with the Scotsman extract, there is no actual mention of which work by Mr Gibbon is under discussion. One is supposed to pick up by various clues that Sunset Song is the one concerned; the squalid book, the anti-kailyard book, the book written after the manner of Zola. Taken together, the extracts suggest that Grassic Gibbon is Scotland's reigning public enemy number one, and forms a natural focus for literary discussion. In another "Newsreel" section later on in Scottish Scene, there is yet another mention, this time in the New York Sun, of a "movement" "that has been in swing for some time" in literature and nationalism that includes "the well-known archaeologist who calls himself Lewis Grassic Gibbon" (p.346). "Archaeologist"? The Americans have not got it completely wrong, though Mitchell's adult studying hours were spent among books rather than stones. Perhaps they believed that rogue story about Mitchell among ruins in Central America recounted in Munro and Ivor Brown.[35] Mitchell might have preferred "polymath" instead. It is in this guise that he tends to appear through the personas of his autobiographical fiction; a polymath too is responsible for the variety of authoritative comment in Scottish Scene.

It is always tempting to plunder Scottish Scene when looking for a Mitchell quotation on anything at all: it contains throwaway remarks on every conceivable subject, most of them designed to provoke Scots and/or everyone else to outrage or debate. The work fizzes with the energy of Gibbon's and MacDiarmid's often diametrically opposed visions of Scotland and the future; Mitchell comments gleefully on what "a scream" this is in a letter to Helen Cruickshank.[36] The reasonably worthy My Scotland of William Power or The Heart of Scotland by George Blake look markedly bland in comparison, while G.M. Thomson's Caledonia, or, The Future of

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35 Munro, p.132; Ivor Brown, introduction to Hutchinson/ Pan Scots Quair.

36 Letter to Helen Cruickshank, see p.48, n.13.

The Scots misdirects its anger the single issue of the Irish in Scotland,[37] in contrast to the beguiling variation in approach of Gibbon/ MacDiarmid. A closer comparison than Power, Blake or Thomson would be T.H. Crosland's The Unspeakable Scot of 1902, which explores impressionistically, journalistically and with brutal humour the vices of the Scottish character.[38] Crosland, though, writes from a position of self-proclaimed English Scotophobia, which Mitchell does not quite achieve.

Mitchell, incidentally, had a lot more to do with the production of the work in its closing stages than MacDiarmid, putting his own name first, selecting the newsreels, and handling deals with the publishers. Responsibility for its genesis and shape is ultimately his.[39] Scottish Scene will be quarried in later chapters, particularly for its racial bombast; there will always be ambiguities as to precise authorial intention. But as a guide to Mitchell on Scotland, it vies for first place with the Quair.

4 A Scots Quair *

While reviling the Modern Scot in 1934, Mitchell could be confident that he was doing better and was continuing to produce better material than anything in its own pages. The Quair is Mitchell's unique attempt at an up-to-date engagement with Scottish self-identity, hinting at avant-garde technique yet rooted in the representation of folk-speech. Seeking to avoid English models in its literary technique by tracing its

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37 William Power, My Scotland (Edinburgh, 1934); George Blake, The Heart of Scotland (London, 1934); George Malcolm Thomson, Caledonia, or, The Future of the Scots (London, 1927), pp.10-16, 73-81.

38 T.H. Crosland, The Unspeakable Scot (London, 1902).

39 See Ian Campbell, "Gibbon and MacDiarmid at Play: The Evolution of Scottish Scene", in The Bibliotheck (1986), vol.13, no. 2, pp. 46-55; Mitchell's initial idea about the book is recounted along with detail on his organisation of it.

* This section begins discussion of the Quair, which continues in the two following sections on rural and then on urban Scotland.

own ancestry through the Kailyard and George Douglas Brown, but also ignoring or devaluing conventional Scottish historical glitter, it begins in a crofting community depicted with an authenticity that goes beyond photographic realism due to its distinctive and complex use of a multiplicity of voices.

Despite the rapid eclipse of the rest of Mitchell's work, the Quair has been seen for some years now as a triumph of Scottish novel-writing, and, by implication, a triumph for Scottishness. There are several problems with this last idea, not least the fact that its heroine Chris Guthrie/Caledonia, Scotland supposedly incarnate in desirable female form, as seen by Ian Campbell, Alan Bold and Kurt Wittig, is never comfortably at home at any point in the three novels.[40] As she develops towards maturity and self-awareness in Kinraddie (which is "the Scots countryside itself" (p.23)), she realises that the majority of the village are fools, gossips and pharisees: Pooty, the Ellisons, the Mutches, the Munros, Gibbon, and her father. She gradually understands the need to assert herself, to believe in herself, to realise that what salvation there is for her will be found in no other name: Angus Calder and Cairns Craig draw attention to this crucial point in two articles involving the Quair.[41] There are, however, a few in Kinraddie worth knowing: aside from her brother Will, who leaves Scotland because he hates it, and her husband Ewan, there are "her best friends" Long Rob and Chae (p.220), whom the village despises for, respectively, atheism and socialism. Of course, strong scenes of community are presented from time to time: one can cite New Year, Chae's fire, Chae's harvest, the Tory election meeting, Guthrie's funeral,

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[40] Ian Campbell, "Chris Caledonia; The Search for an Identity", in Scottish Literary Journal (December, 1974), vol.1, no.2, pp.45-57;
Alan Bold, Modern Scottish Literature (Harlow, 1983), p.133;
Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature (Edinburgh, 1958), p.331.

[41] Angus Calder, "A Mania for Self-Reliance", in D. Jefferson and G. Martin (eds.) The Uses of Fiction (Milton Keynes, 1982), pp.99-113;
Cairns Craig, "Fearful Selves: Character, Community, and the Scottish Imagination", in Cencrastus (Winter, 1980-81), pp.29-32.

Chris's wedding. But if fire, harvest and wedding show a breadth of village involvement, Rob and Chae take starring roles in each case. The New Year celebration we witness consists only of the Guthries, Chae and Rob -- who are the main actors in the riot against Rose the Tory. John Guthrie's funeral has much gossipy ambiguity in it. At the end of the novel, Robert Colquohoun gives a memorial oration for the war dead, who are Ewan, Chae, Rob, and someone of whom only passing mention has been made, James Leslie (the name, perhaps, suggesting what Sunset Song's author's fate could so easily have been). These men

> *were the last of the peasants, the last of the old Scots folk* [. . .]. *It was the old Scotland that perished then, and we may believe that never again will the old speech and the old song* [. . .] *rise but with alien efforts to our lips.* (p.256)

Colquohoun's point is partly borne out by the newly-arrived ploughmen who look and listen but fail to understand; they are not part of the world of Sunset Song, of what was a relatively organic community -- a community, though, that despised its most organic members. Rob and Chae are archetypally Scottish when dead, having been in effect anti-Scottish, their beliefs having been strongly contrary to the prevailing mood of "the Scots countryside itself" (SS, p.23) when living.

In Cloud Howe the population of Segget gossips yet more uncharitably and obsessively than Kinraddie's. Chris spends her time in the Manse as Robert's supporter, ignoring the social work that ministers' wives are generally expected to do. When challenged on this by Mrs Geddes, supreme advocate of the Women's Rural Institute (WRI), she replies that she prefers to mind her own business and let others mind theirs. When a farmer's daughter in Kinraddie she felt that the minister poked his nose where it was not wanted (CH, p.102). There is substantial justice in this, but she does not mix with any group at all; this might be attributed to the position of married women at the time. How, though, does this square with the liberal and forward-

looking Colquohoun, who, one would have thought, would be encouraging Chris to do something active in the town? As much as anything else, it is Chris's frank pride that she is in Segget but not of it. There are exceptions to this, such as when she warms to the maid, Else Queen, and reaps the benefits, or warms to Muir the gravedigger and Ake the carpenter -- both of whom estimate Segget life in markedly unflattering terms.

It is also noteworthy that Colquohoun himself, despite identification of thought with "all those worth their salt in Scotland" against Mowat and his kind (p.107), is capable of making brutally stark demarcations between his household and the rest of Scotland: "*My God, were there ever folk like the Scots! Not only THEM -- you and I are as bad.*" (p.84) On this occasion, Chris takes "their" part, and says how kind "they" would be; they would minister to Jesus Christ's hurts even while gossipping destructively about him. Kindness, Chris has already decided, runs "deep in the dour Scots blood" (CH, p.44), but one of the novel's strengths is the capacity to be dialectical; debates about Scotland that are never quite won pervade the trilogy. For it is the Kindness family, unfriended in Segget, that is evicted twice by officialdom in the closing pages of Cloud Howe, finding it so difficult to find a room to stay in that they end up in a shed, which proves fatal for their child, whose thumb is gnawed off by a rat. The irony in the name is obvious yet effective.[42]

Again dialectical is the debate on Scottish religion. Chris tells Will in Sunset Song that the Scots have "never BELIEVED": they have just gone along to church to "collect and argue" (p. 217). Yet she swings round a little in Cloud Howe:

> [Y]ou'd said that the Scots had never been religious, had never BELIEVED [. . .]. There was something lacking or something added, something that was bred in your bones in this land -- oh, Something: maybe that something was GOD -- (p.52)

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[42] One can only rely on Scots to be kind if they are expatriates, such as Bill Anderson in I and S or Mrs Roupell in SR.

Robert divides the Scots into two halves, those who "*think of God as a Scot with brosy morals and a penchant for Burns*" and those who "*are over damned mean to allow [him] even existence*" (p.135). If his orthodoxies are finally dashed at the end of Cloud Howe, as he looks for a non-religious solution to contemporary problems, unorthodox religion suggests itself again in Grey Granite when Ewan is told that he "*must believe there's something*" but replies "*I don't think it's God*" (p.49). Much attention has been paid to Ewan's ultimate, pregnant description of life's struggles all enacting a basic contest between "FREEDOM and GOD" (p.210)[43] but it is perhaps mistaken to identify some all-binding last word in a work such as the Quair. Comparably, Birkin's final words in Women in Love invite further debate beyond the novel's confines.[44]

Similarly, when Will says that Scotland is "*dead or dying -- and a damned good job!*" (SS, p. 216) and then Chris thinks in reply that "Scotland lived, she could never die, the land would outlast them all", neither position can be seen as absolutely final -- although here their definitions of "Scotland" are markedly different. Will believes there is no social or economic hope for Scotland, Chris that the land's physical existence can never be eradicated. Her view might be considered naïve and beside the point, were it not for the intimacy of the link between land and people explored through the Quair. What exactly "the land" is, Mitchell can never fully be sure; in his Scottish Scene essay on the subject it is first of all farmland, but that then becomes suspect as it is too relatively tamed and domesticated; the real "land out there" consists of non-cultivable moor and mountain (see ScSc, pp.293, 300). Admittedly, this is an aberration in an oeuvre which so often takes "essential" Scotland to be peasant

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[43] Patricia J. Wilson "FREEDOM and GOD: Some Implications of the Key Speech in A Scots Quair" in Scottish Literary Journal (1980), pp.55-79.

[44] See David Lodge's discussion of Women in Love in After Bakhtin (London, 1990), p.63.

Scotland; one undeniable example of this feeling of Mitchell's is provided by Michael McGrath's analysis of the Free Man anti-J.H.Whyte article in which Mitchell writes of the difficulty of defining Scotland due to its cosmopolitan nature. He lists a number of the country's residents, such as one originally Irish, another Polish, another Harrow-educated, another an "inadequately Celticised fisherman on the Western Islands" and another a Mearns ploughman. There is only one of these, the last mentioned, who is an indigenous Scot.[45]

This notwithstanding, the Quair is a condition-of-Scotland novel with a very deliberately panoramic sweep. If "the land", whatever exactly that means, has for Mitchell a raw, primal essence denied Scottish towns and cities, archetypal Scotland of the twenties and thirties consists of town and city, because it consists of where the trilogy is. When Wittig talks of his three static levels of personal/social/mythic running through the trilogy, or when J. T. Low makes Jean Guthrie into mother Eve, they are taking unimaginative and restrictive liberties with the text.[46] However, the response of Isobel Murray, that authenticity and realism should be stressed, as opposed to the limiting doctrine of types, has its own problems.[47] It is undeniable that Mitchell shows great interest in setting up archetypes, if most regularly in Cloud Howe:

> [I]t was the Scots countryside itself [. . .]. (SS, p.23)
> He was to say later he felt stared at by Scotland herself [. . .]. (CH, p.105)
> *You looked like a hunter yourself, strayed and lost from the golden age* [. . .]. (CH, p.120)
> *Oh Chris Caledonia, I've married a nation!* (CH, p.132)
> It was not Mowat then, but his whole class she was looking at [. . .]. (CH, p.148)
> It was not Cis alone, her tale -- but all tales she harkened to then [. . .]. (CH, p.171)
> Sometimes it seemed to her that he was the keelies, all of them, himself [. . .]. (GG, p.192)

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45 McGrath, p.208, re. "News of Battle: Queries for Mr Whyte".

46 Wittig, p.330;
J.T. Low (ed.), SS (London, 1971) in notes on the novel's symbolism, p.295.

47 Isobel Murray and Bob Tait, "A Scots Quair", in Ten Modern Scottish Novels (Aberdeen, 1984), pp.10-31.

Now while these remarks suggest archetypes, to Cairns Craig's mind involving over-identifications,[48] they are, rather, attempts to provoke a response from the reader by freeze-frame than rigid ideas designed to constrict the trilogy's themes or significances; there is no sense in interpreting Chris's every (in)action in terms of Scottish national allegory, and as we have seen, she is well capable of standing outside of her nation and looking quizzically in. But such pregnant material as the above has inevitable effect on throwaway remarks like Colquohoun's to Dalziel: "*You're the kind of scoundrel over-common in Scotland*" (CH p.130). Scotland is going downhill; virtues of kindness and decency are held in low regard not just by Dalziel of the Meiklebogs but by a whole obnoxious army of his kind. On another occasion, Chris begins a thought thus: "Whatever else happened to Segget, to Scotland -- and there were strange things waiting to happen [. . .]." (CH p.107) The problems of Scottish identity and of Scotland's economy are discussed with absolute immediacy to Segget, despite its provincialism. Scottish national affairs impinge directly on the town because of Mowat's fascism and his jute mills, and because of the spinners' and Colquohoun's socialist idealism. Similarly, Grey Granite's world *is* Scotland in the thirties: a Scotland of stark poverty, of conflict between sections of the Left and of an increasingly apocalyptic urban atmosphere. Nineteen-thirties Scotland seems to be a place more ashamed of itself than ever before in terms of the language it speaks; one which laughs at feeble self-mimicking as seen in "Gappy Gowkheid" and "Snellie Guff" (p.171), corresponding to Harry Lauder and his kind. If Scotland has any cultural integrity left it is to be found momentarily in the dances such as reels and Scottisches played by Fat Jake at the Young Reds League benefit night. If there can be no doubt that blame can be laid at the English door for Scottish inferiority complexes,

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48 Cairns Craig, "Visitors From the Stars: Scottish Film Culture", in Cencrastus (New Year, 1983), pp.6-11 (8).

it is worth noting that Mitchell never reviles the English simply for being English: he hates those who try to represent Scotland under false colours whether as M.P.s (the Tory Mr Rose in Sunset Song) or as general statesmen (Mowat in Cloud Howe). He reviles Scots who pretend to be English (a number of characters in the trilogy) and he hates the consequent distortions in personal relations, the heightened class prejudices and pretensions, the blows against Braid Scots as a functioning language. This is why Chris feels an antagonism against her English side; "the [English] words meant nothing at all" (SS p.32) not because English is an inherently useless means of expression, but because it is not true enough for her.[49]

Robert's final speech in Cloud Howe expresses hope and despair for "*this Christian land*" (p.210) -- presumably Scotland, given its relentless thematic foregrounding and the ideas of "the God of old Scotland" in Sunset Song (see Chae's speech, p.97). Cloud Howe ends immediately on Robert's death, and gestures towards an exploration of possible hope and possible surgery for his nation in the sequel-to-be, Grey Granite. Robert has also been inevitably concerned with hope for Britain as a whole: in a more optimistic phase of his career he has talked of "the miners, of labour, of the coming struggle in the month of May." (CH, p.143) If Robert's action is always local, the struggle that has taken up his time is one involving the bulk of British Labour, ending with the Unions' ignominious surrender at Downing Street. Jim Trease in Grey Granite has thought and physically been far afield: "a propagandist wide over Scotland and England [. . .] he'd been with Connolly at the Easter rising in Dublin" (GG, p.181). Ewan himself sets off on a hunger march to London, bidding his mother farewell with little reference to coming back or seeing her again. Grey

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[49] English was, though, true for Mitchell in the thirties. Jean Baxter recounts asking him about his English accent. The response: "He had deliberately shed a lot of his Scotchness, not that he wanted to be mistaken for an Englishman, but in his opinion a broad Scots accent got you nowhere and indeed he considered it a handicap among cultured people." (Jean Baxter, AUL Memoir, p.2)

Granite is undeniably profoundly Scottish, but the issues seem to have become finally larger towards the end of the trilogy, ultimately involving world capitalism. The proud Scots peasant Chris rejects the urban, rejects historical change and ongoing political causes, going back to the land and merging with it, the final scene ambiguous as to actual death or mere symbolism, but unavoidably involving finality in Chris's progression through life. Part of the trilogy's logic is that while its depictions are self-consciously archetypal of Scotland, their own multiplicity means that no one Scotland exists, only Scotlands. One Scotland dies with the four soldiers at the end of Sunset Song; Will's similar Scotland has died somewhere on the way; another Scotland dies with Chris Guthrie, the part-time, stand-in, national symbol; more Scotlands are no doubt to emerge from the explosive smoke of the mid-thirties and mingle with the Scotlands Chris has stood apart from and rejected, but Mitchell does not have an optimistic view of their possibilities.

5 Rural Nostalgia

Horrified by the Scottish urban scene, Mitchell does take the opportunity more than once to deny that he suffers from the Scottish nostalgia disease. In both The Thirteenth Disciple and in his essay "The Land" he pillories back-to-nature enthusiasts who wish to idealise peasant life and send urbanites back into it:

> Sometimes, unkindly, he would vision Mr Chesterton sentenced to pass three years at Chapel o' Seddel as a hired man; pictures of a large, distinguished presence staggering across the slimy floors of Chapel o' Seddel byre behind a barrow-load of reeking manure often cheered [Malcom's] dourer moments. (TD, p.23)

> [T]hey are promising to make of a young, ricketic man, with the phthisis of Glasgow in his throat, a bewildered labourer in pelting rains and the flares of head-aching suns [. . .]. ("The Land", p.295)

It is true that Mitchell never changes his mind to the extent of making Chestertonian suggestions himself. The harshness of crofting in Kinraddie in Sunset Song, not always fully noted, has counterparts in his Scottish short stories.[50] We see the agricultural work ethic run riot in "Sim" and "Clay": the former sees a young man work obsessively in order to achieve his own place, a wife, and then prosperity for his children, only to experience frustration in marriage and disappointment in parenthood; over twenty years of hard labour has gone (in his eyes) for nothing. In the latter story, Rob Galt ploughs, sows and reaps to the extent of ignoring his family, even when prospects of university are involved for his daughter and fatal illness strikes his wife. "Greenden" shows an English city-bred wife, Ellen Simpson, go to the country with her husband: she is driven mad by a combination of isolation, loneliness and fixation on a particular hill she can see from house. These stories, alongside "Smeddum", an upbeat anti-marriage tale, show Mitchell's gift for writing well about crofting life -- which Sunset Song suggests is now largely over. The last of the five stories, "Forsaken", involving Jesus coming back to life as a Jew in urban Scotland, is more uncertain in style and effectiveness. This is probably because writing about a rural background comes to Mitchell more naturally. There are moments, though, when he pushes this too far, such as in this protestation in "The Land" about his present identity:

> Autumn of all seasons is when I realise how very Scotch I am, how interwoven with the fibre of my body and personality is this land with its scarce, queer, harvests [. . .]. (ScSc, p.303)

Another instance in the oeuvre exists where this lover of natural fibres weaves the same kind of pattern. This occurs in The Speak of the Mearns, as Keith Stratoun and

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[50] Collected in ScSc and then in A Scots Hairst.

his brothers remember the beginning of their stay at Maiden Castle:

> The boys were never to forget that spring, it wove into the fabric of their beings and spread scent and smell and taste and sound, till it obscured into a faint far mist all their days and nights in the town of Montrose. (p.55)

This semi-autobiographical piece of nostalgia puts the excerpt from "The Land" in context; it was in childhood that Mitchell felt his own soul to be interwoven with the land, and he looks back with fond memories on this aspect of his past. Keith could not have stayed in the Howe in Speak of the Mearns when he grew up had the novel continued; his nervous imagination and intelligence would have found the social atmosphere difficult to tolerate. Like Mitchell or Malcom Maudslay, he would have made his way elsewhere. Mitchell draws on childhood sensation and feeling in the essay to heighten its sense of involvement with a Scotland he rarely stayed in long after settling in Welwyn.[51] The Mitchell of the Quair knows change and decay in all around, including inside the "fabric" of his "being".

When he does actually go up to the old country to write sections of "The Land", acknowledgement is made of the limitations of being there:

> This Tyrian splendour on Drumtochty hill is probably unmatched in all Scotland [. . .]. I would never apprehend its full darkly colourful beauty until I had gone back to England, far from it, down in the smooth pastures of Hertfordshire one night I would remember it and itch to write of it, I would see it without the inessentials -- sweat and flies and that hideous gimcrack castle [. . .]. I would see it in simplicity then. Even as I would see the people of the land. (ScSc, p.300)

Initially one might believe that it is a case simply of the scenic poverty of the South throwing Drumtochty into sharp relief: but when Mitchell admits that in Hertfordshire he would mentally censor the scene of sweat and flies, the exile-wish becomes more

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51 See note 4 on rarity of visits.

apparent. After all, "we Scots have little interest in the wild and its world" (p.304) and they therefore need to go somewhere else -- England, for instance -- to recognise clearly our own country's beauty. Mitchell expresses his Scottish identity at one point in terms of the "scant harvests" and the "hours of reeking sunshine and stifling rain" for which he confesses nostalgia, at the same time as he actually basks in Hertfordshire's "seasons of mists and mellow fruitfulness" (p.303).

In Stained Radiance we see something akin to such attitudes. Thea Mayven feels pangs of memory which are half-fake:

> In Scotland, on the little farm where she had been born, she had hated the peasant life. In London she remembered it with gladness and with tears, a thing of surprises and rains and evening scents and the lowing of lone herds across the wine-red moors. Yearly she went to Scotland for a holiday seeking the sunset and the peewit's cry. Then she would find her days obsessed with talk of cattle disease and the smells of unclean byres and earwigs crawling down her back when she lay in a field. She would long for London as her spiritual home and as a haven of security. (p.17)

While she may wish to be back in Leekan as soon as she has returned home, this wish is under more control. When she misses London in Leekan, she has to go back there. She can live in London and bask in farm-directed nostalgia, but cannot live in Leekan and pine calmly for London.

Another example of strongly nostalgic writing occurs in the Cairo short story "Daybreak", written in the twenties. We are confronted with this braw ballad in the first few lines:

> Oh, the memory and the ache
> They have stol'n the heart fra me;
> And there's heather on the hills
> Of my ain countree. (SH, p.223)

This is sung by a woman named Dawn. She is an authentic Scottish peasant girl in

the short story "Daybreak", the choice of which for A Scots Hairst involves suspect editorial judgement. Dawn is in Scotland when she sings, but the tale is being told in Cairo, and the song's primary function is to indulge in faraway Scottish otherness. Snippets from the Quair in which Scottishness is loved and cherished may be paralleled with Dawn. One thinks of Ellen Johns as she falls in love with Ewan:

> [A]ll the old stories were true [. . .]. Oh, all true that they'd sung in the olden times in this queer Scotland that had felt so alien, the dark, queer songs of loss and desire, of men and women and the daftness of love, dear daftness of soft Scotch speech, on Scotch lips [. . .]. (GG, p.117)

From a different perspective, there is Chris's wedding scene and her internal commentary on the songs being sung:

> [I]t came on Chris how strange was the sound of Scotland's singing, made for the sadness of the land and sky in dark autumn evenings, the crying of men and women of the land who had seen their lives and loves sink away in the years, things wept for beside the sheep-buchts, remembered at night and in twilight. The gladness and kindness had passed, lived and forgotten, it was Scotland of the mist and rain and the crying sea that made the songs -- (SS, p.165)

Chris's example of this lush sense of loss involves a kind of double nostalgia rivalling that of Tolkien; years ago these sad Scots folk lived under dark skies and sang nostalgic songs.[52] They have now passed on, leaving faint traces of their lives behind to be emotionally mused over. Later on in the trilogy, it is the action of Sunset Song, beautified by the passage of time, that Chris and most literary critics yearn for in, or when reading about, brutal Duncairn, despite the fact that Sunset Song is hardly idyllic. The representation of Ellen's consciousness here seems in part a recycling of

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[52] See J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings (London, 1954) in which nostalgia for the past world of the ancient elves hundreds of years ago is overlaid with nostalgia for the passing world of Elrond, Galadriel, Celeborn, etc.

Chris's. On the other hand, Chris feels organically part of Scottish oral culture whereas all of it for English Ellen has the thrill of otherness. In both passages it is old times which are eulogised; Mitchell's most intense expressions of his love for Scotland seem to be *et in Arcadia ego* or *et in Arcadia illi* affairs. The richness of this exploration of time and memory does not transfer itself to the urban scene, even though it is there that Ellen is intoxicated; she is not intoxicated with Duncairn but with versions of Scotland mediated through a complexity of different agencies.

The above examples from the Quair and the essays suggest money as one inspiring motivation; they would be lapped up by Scots in general, anxious to sentimentalise a heritage and a past. Expatriate Scots in particular would be able to indulge in a type of national fantasy, albeit not as inaccurate and counterproductive as that of the kailyard. This may explain to some degree Sunset Song's success in the United States.[53] Troublingly, the above examples also provoke the reflection that in much of his work, particularly Gay Hunter, Mitchell takes a position close to that of D.H. Lawrence and F.R. Leavis with regard to lived experience, where life is something that should be felt at the most immediate, unmediated levels; avoid thinking, but rather *do* and *feel*.[54] The hunters' songs are depictions of what is around them, about birds, beasts; they are about things the Hunters have just been involved with or are about to be involved with. In the thirties, however, Mitchell seems to spend his time thinking Scottish thoughts rather than revelling in lived Scottish experience.

6 Urban Myth

Lived experience in the Quair sites itself ultimately in the Scottish city, which is unredeemable as portrayed by Mitchell. As said before, the city of Duncairn *is*

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[53] See Munro, p.97.

[54] See GH, p.179: "They did not dream of life -- they lived it and sang it instead."

nineteen-thirties Scotland, the rural scene functioning as a pleasant backdrop for days off and a dying fall, but one increasingly less important to the passage of history. In Grey Granite, what does the city consist of, and who lives there? It consists of appalling factories, appalling housing, and nice housing. The boarding-house exists somewhere in between but is nobody's real home. It functions as a handy index for certain pieces of information about the city rather than a site of action relevant to the city. Light entertainment for the reader is to be had from the lower-middle class within its walls, but this class is not the star attraction, paling beside Mitchell's stylised, polarised contrast between the poor and the rich. The poor come from "the stews of Paldy and Kirrieben and Footforthie", and have "thin antrin faces" (p.106) and live in an area like the one Chris walks through to find Meg:

> The pavements were sweating a greasy slime [. . .]. The broken windows and the tattered doors and the weary faces of the women going by, basket-laden, all the place had a smell of hippens, unwashed, and old stale meat and God knew what. (p.27)

We find that Meg's father was the unfortunate who asked Chris for a tanner: his appearance has been described thus:

> His face was thin and dirty and brown, he'd no shirt, his jacket pinned over his breast, smelt awful, great knuckled hands [. . .]. (p.17)

He is from the ranks of the unemployed:

> Aye plenty of them, yawning and wearied, with their flat-soled boots and their half-starved faces, they'd cry their bit bars as they stared at the stir, or chirp a bit filth to a passing quean. (p.17)

All this is perhaps standard urban fare, reminiscent (to a degree) of city squalour in Stained Radiance or The Thirteenth Disciple. But this novel is more remorseless and goes further. Duncairn's proletariat, industrial and lumpen alike, are being brutalised into the non-human. Mitchell, writing in Darwin/Wells mode, has already interested

himself earlier on in the trilogy in departures from human appearance and dignity towards that of the animals or worse; a futret, a bull, a cat, and so on stand in for Ewan, Minister Gibbon and Mistress Munro in Sunset Song (pp.14, 54, 142). Hairy Hogg in Cloud Howe feels Colquohoun's remarks about our being descended from the apes to be far too close for comfort (p.59) and Dalziel of the Meiklebogs is undoubtedly a beast, being "like a Highland bull, with his hair and his horns and maybe other things" (p.31).

The spinners begin to take on a strange identity, with a distinctive, unpleasant twang to their voices; they all live in the Old Toun and suffer mass unemployment. They are always considered different to everyone else, like a different race, even though Jock Cronin can climb successfully out of the pit into Labourite blandness. The side-effects of urbanisation are available for inspection, in miniature, in Segget, before we ever get to Duncairn. It is with this background of dehumanisation in mind that we should read Ewan's visit to the "ghastly house" of his friend Bob:

> [Bob's] mother all running to a pale grey fat like a thing you found when you turned up a stone, one of the brothers a cretin, rickets -- sat giggling and slavering in a half-dark corner, they couldn't afford to have the gas on, a dead smell of dirt left unstirred and unscrubbed, disharmonic heads and moron brains. (p.70)

Is this mother human? She does not appear to be. And what about Alick's sister Meg? She is "filling out a bit, pale still, but not that slat of a board with a dress tacked on it that she'd once been." (p.118) The fact that she is not like that any more cannot instantly remove the image used. In the same way, though Ewan's thoughts on the "pale grey fat thing" occur when he is distinctly anti-keelie and depressed, the image lingers on. Meg does, of course, interact with other human beings as boarding-house maid, and follow ordinary convention in (presumably) getting married to Steve Selden. When, however, she becomes that slat of a board with dress tacked on, or when Bob's mother is a pale grey fat thing it is as if the lid has been lifted off the

proletariat's true state: they are, in fact, brutalised monsters. The keelies' bodies continue to have their human integrity violated right to the end, as Norman Cruikshank lies in a hospital bed, half of his face eaten away by flame.

Mitchell makes a point of stressing what for him is the unpleasant truth; just as we keep being told in Cloud Howe that all human faces have hideous-looking skulls underneath them, we will also recall that the urbanites in Mitchell's "Glasgow" essay consist of "the life that festers in the courts and wynds" where it is far worse than in Tierra del Fuego (Darwin's and his successors' handy example of the most wretched conditions in the world). The hundred and fifty thousand in this category

> eat and sleep and copulate and conceive and crawl into childhood in those waste jungles of stench and disease and hopelessness, sub-humans as definitely as the Morlocks of Wells -- and without even the consolation of feeding on their oppressors' flesh. (ScSc, pp.137-8)

No-one actually likes Grey Granite's poor dehumanised creatures at the novel's end. Chris never did, due to peasant pride, though she wishes to avoid excesses of snobbery and inconsiderateness. Ellen tries to, but always finds "a wall of glass" cutting her off from them (p.192), basically because she is over-refined and English. Ewan has a partial love-encounter with them lasting for about half the novel, from his romantic identification with the downtrodden in the Museum until the time that he realises under Trease's direction that he and Jim, not the strike-shy keelies, constitute the true working class.

But how do Duncairn's other half live? Bailie Brown gives occasional comment to the press before dressing for dinner or going to booze-ups on the rates; Provost Jimmy Speight speaks his conservative mind from the luxury of his garden in front of a house which is "a gey brave-looking place with fal-lal ornaments forward and back and a couple of towers stuck on for luck like warts on the nose of Oliver Cromwell" (p.68). The Reverend Edward MacShilluck prospers, eats well, and screws his well-

fed housekeeper in the manse (p.58), while his Craigneuks congregation winces with anguish at the news of demonstrations. Craigneuks

> could hardly push down its grape-fruit and porridge and eggs and bacon and big salt baps, fine butter fresh from the creamery, fresh milk and tea that tasted like tea, not like the seep from an ill-kept sump. And it said weren't those Footforthie keelies awful? (p.122)

They are. We know. There are good reasons for Mitchell, in what is after all a short novel, to attend to, and protest about, actual polarities in living conditions. But his despair about the possibility for decent individuals to improve their lives without going bourgeois is a deep one. John Cushnie and Ena Lyon, of rather proletarian origins, wish to turn their backs on their class and move as far as possible into the ranks of the respectable. The boarding-house, having been in a sense a gesture towards moderation in urban living, breaks up, partly due to Chris's aversion to the city. Only Ellen Johns wishes to pursue the road of moderation. She tries to mix toned-down radicalism in her schoolteaching job with a decent flat and car and extracurricular socialist activity. Ewan rejects her; she can either be respectable and bourgeois or wear old shabby clothes and be in the Communist party. Out of the trilogy she goes; Carol Anderson points legitimately to Mitchell's empathetic interest in her consciousness, but her story, as far as we see it, ends in the failure of moderation.[55]

In the essay on Aberdeen, society is presented as less relentlessly confrontational than in the depiction of Duncairn -- although, as Ian Campbell notes, there are numerous similarities.[56] Mitchell does have a "Cautionary Note" to Grey Granite, claiming that Duncairn

> is merely the city which the inhabitants of the Mearns (not foreseeing my requirements in completing my trilogy) have hitherto failed to build.

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55 Anderson, pp.369-75.

56 Ian Campbell, Lewis Grassic Gibbon, p.104.

The difference in the descriptions of Duncairn and Aberdeen suggests that Mitchell wished to damn his archetypal Scottish city, but be more equivocal about Aberdeen, of which he had nostalgic memories. Munro comments in A Scots Hairst on the mildness and humour of the piece, and indeed, one reads of the city's good hotels, large teas and frustratingly enigmatic lovability.[57] But on the other hand, it is not merely that "the investigator" whom Mitchell uses as narrator-surrogate to take us round eschews the women and law-courts: it is that he seems suspiciously akin to the "good Englishman" or "good American" of the opening remarks. He finds the city very foreign to him and, guided by Mitchell's steady hand, carefully checks the train timetable for the journey home. Is the investigator simply the reader, given remarks such as "You will have the feeling of one caught in a corridor of the hills" or "Yet (and to presume that the sleet is over, and you are now in your overcoat) if you turn rightwards from Wallace [. . .]"? (pp.242, 244) He is the reader in part, although Mitchell has a penchant for inserting the second person singular into anything he can (Sp or I and S or GH, for example -- p.130, p.113, p.12 respectively). He is also more than this, being a peculiar textual device serving more than one purpose, deriving perhaps from Wells' investigator of stout-hearted England, the American Mr Direck in Mr Britling Sees It Through.[58]

In the "Glasgow" essay, a harsher piece, Mitchell's investigator pops up again, not only seeing the strangeness of this "vomit of a cataleptic commercialism" (ScSc, p.136) but full-bloodedly entering into the bourgeois swing of things by travelling around "disguised" as one of a set of "Nice Glaswegians" who "admire the scenery and calculate its horse-power and drink whisky and chaff one another in genteelly Anglicised Glaswegianisms" (p.136). He is not Mitchell himself, because Mitchell

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57 Ian Munro [ed.], SH, see comment on p.65.

58 Wells, Mr Britling Sees It Through (London, 1916).

must remain outside the bourgeois domain and watch proceedings circumspectly:

> I realise (seated on the plump modernity of the *Modern Scot* by the side of my investigator on Loch Lomond-Bank) how completely philistine I am. (p.141)

The investigator reads Adam Kennedy's The Mourners, from which Mitchell quotes at length:

> John's eyes savoured the spaciousness of the crescent, the formal curve of their unbroken line of house facades, the regimentation of the rows of chimney-pots, the full-length windows, the unnecessarily broad front steps, the feudal basements -- savoured all these in the shimmering heat of the day just as his nose had savoured the morning freshness. It was as good for him to walk round these old terraces as to visit a cathedral [. . .]. But the modern mind was no longer sure of itself even in a four-roomed bungalow. Its pride was the splitting of its personality into broods of impish devils that spent their time spying one on the other. It could never get properly outside itself, could never achieve the objectivity that was capable of such grandly deliberate planning as in these streets. (p.138-9)

Mitchell's reaction: "Glasgow speaks. The hundred and fifty thousand [Govan slum-dwellers] are answered. Glasgow has spoken." He wishes to shock us by the gulf (like the gulf in Duncairn) between his lurid picture of the worst of the slums and the perspective of another writer, who seems to worship half-unwillingly at the shrine of Kelvingrove. There is no middle way, no average suburbia full of decent petit-bourgeois; at least, that is not where Mitchell wishes to direct our attention.

Kelvingrove and Govan, then, are the important polarities here. To be fair to Mitchell, he makes a partial exception for the Gorbals -- this is a charming slum area:

> Stout men in beards and ringlets and unseemly attire lounge and strut with pointed shoes: Ruth and Naomi go by with downcast Eastern faces, the Lascar rubs shoulders with the Syrian. [T]he stench [. . .] is haunted by an ancient ghost of goodness and grossness, sun-warmed and ripened by alien suns. (p.144)

Mitchell can congratulate himself on being cosmopolitan enough to be aware of and celebrate this charming, teeming foreign life. But the Gorbals is a one-off exception in Scotland, "lovably and absurdly and delightfully and hideously un-Scottish" (p.144). It is more like the heterogeneous East End of London described in Stained Radiance, which presents the English city as having rather a different atmosphere and accents. Before any conclusion about Mitchell and Scotland can be reached, an account has to be given of his relationship with England.

Chapter 3: England

Introduction

Mitchell's time in England divides up into residence in London (1923-29), where an air force clerkship followed a period of unemployment, and then in Welwyn (1929-35) where he worked as a full-time writer. His novels referring to his London days, such as Stained Radiance and The Thirteenth Disciple, make grim reading at times, dealing as they do with bitter personal experiences of poverty and hardship. This chapter will nevertheless argue that England, in the fiction and essays overall, receives much more charitable treatment than Scotland or indeed anywhere else. This should not be entirely surprising, given the evidence of the last chapter and the one following this, where a close-up look at an assumed Cosmopolitanism reveals serious flaws.

If Mitchell does not keep his eye on England and Englishness in the sustained way that he might have done, a number of descriptions and declarations cumulatively add up to a kind of literary Anglophilia. The influence of Wells is often involved in such instances. This discussion will begin with Mitchell's first novel, at the same time as returning to the debate about his depictions of urban life.

1 London

In Mitchell's first novel Stained Radiance, London's East End is seen as magical in a way that has elements in common with his later description of the Gorbals:

> But East in Poplar and Limehouse there were Chinamen and Negroes and forgers. In Soho were Bolsheviks and Italians [. . .]. Somewhere, in the streets and places she still had to visit, there lived and flourished Romance. (SR, p.17)

London teems with variety and charm in a way that Glasgow on the whole does

not. Its low life is exemplified by the Cockney Salvation Army worker-cum-prostitute. Her life is in many ways unhappy, involving frequent sexual exploitation and a diet of hideous Army tea. She is, however, neither a passive, stupid victim nor a dehumanised dummy, but a witty, vociferous woman capable of carrying on a double life of religion and prostitution in order to survive in the conditions of her native city.

The nearest we get to an overview of London as an entity is when the novel's protagonist John Garland wanders for miles around it, distraught, while waiting for his wife to give birth. This much is almost certainly autobiographical on Mitchell's part. During this time, the extraordinary diversity of the city begins to come home to him:

> Until those days and nights, Garland had never realised the extent of London. Its multitudes of streets and alleys shocked him as might some obscene and unlooked-for country discovered as hinterland to a well-known coast. He wandered them at all hours, aimlessly, mile upon mile of them, so that he strayed far away into North London, east into the depths of Limehouse, lost himself amongst the innumerable by-ways of Thames-side, came unexpectedly upon stretches of countryside, upon queer, old-time gardens, lost in slopes of slums, upon houses of strange beauty standing on high hills and overlooking all London. Especially at night-time was he astounded at the unknown beauty of London -- beauty of the spirit, he told himself [!] -- and would wander in mazes of speculation as to the relation of beauty to the human mind, the while his feet trod the muddied mazes of the New Cut. He had never before realised London. (p.271)

Despite the one reference to slums, it is the word "beauty" that stands out, used no less than four times: this quality is fundamentally foreign to Duncairn.

In The Thirteenth Disciple, Mitchell's next novel, Malcom Maudslay also has cause to tramp through the streets of the capital, as Mitchell did in a variety of menial capacities in 1923:

> He had discovered London. "I don't mean place exploited in guide-books and literary weeklies by those odd freaks of twitterment who imagine that London is Fleet Street and the City [. . .]. But the real London --"

> His range ran through the Buxworth's house in Chelsea north through Kensington and Hammersmith and Shepherd's Bush, Notting Hill, Paddington, Kilburn, Hampstead, north-east through Highgate, Hornsey, Crouch End, Walthamstow, south-west through Holloway, Stoke Newington and Kentish Town, where festered the ancient lowly, the cheated of the sunlight [. . .] into areas of grubby respectability and "No Hawkers"-defended semi-detachment [. . .]. He accumulated stores of wisdom regarding the inhabitants of strange roads and lanes and lost little culs-de-sac piled behind Euston and the White City and St. John's Hospital. (p.168)

It is possible that material for the two passages above simply occurred to Mitchell during his own London walks, as William McIlvanney may have written his piece about the nature of Glasgow in The Big Man using his own experiences without being conscious of the literary precedents of Alan Sharp, Archie Hind, or Alasdair Gray.[1] On the other hand, this is what Wells wrote in Marriage (1912) about Trafford, who, like John Garland, is another semi-autobiographical individualist London stroller with a fraught domestic situation. Trafford walks and walks and explores:

> In all his life hitherto he had never been beyond a certain prescribed area of London's immensities, except by the most casual and uninstructed straying. He knew Chelsea and Kensington and the north bank [and . . .] fragments about the British Museum and Holborn and Regent's Park [. . .]. He had never been on Hampstead Heath nor visited the Botanical Gardens nor gone down the Thames below London Bridge [. . .].
>
> He discovered the limitless unknown greater London, the London of this majority, as if he had never thought of it before. He went out to inspect favourable sites in regions whose very names were unfamiliar to him, travelled on dirty little intra-urban railway lines to hitherto unimagined railway stations, found parks, churches, workhouses, institutions, public houses, canals, factories, gas-works, ware-houses, foundries, and sidings, amidst a multitudinous dinginess of mean houses, shabby back yards, and ill-kept streets. There seemed to be no limits to this thread-bare side of London, it went on northward, eastward,

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[1] Self-conscious discussions or musings about how Glasgow is perceived come in William McIlvanney, The Big Man (London, 1985), pp.129-30; Archie Hind, The Dear Green Place (Edinburgh, 1984; first published London, 1966), pp.11-23; Alan Sharp, A Green Tree in Gedde (Glasgow, 1984; first published London, 1965), pp.256-57; Alasdair Gray, Lanark (Edinburgh, 1981), p.243.

over the Thames southward, for mile after mile, endlessly.[2]

Trafford does go on to take a dim view of the local sordid-seeming population, whose food, education and skin is noticeably sub-standard. He wonders what can be done for them. If the passage is not exactly complimentary to London, it is in awe of the metropolis. Trafford has been caught staring at an immense complexity with which neither he nor the novel itself can begin to deal. It is unfortunate that the momentary interest generated through Trafford in the condition of the East End has a bogus quality about it: no novel in his entire oeuvre sustains a lengthy description or analysis of conditions there. Trafford and Wells's other characters merely pass through. With Scottish cities, Leslie Mitchell schematises; with London, in both Stained Radiance and The Thirteenth Disciple he reproduces the more confused Wells line to some extent but puts things more positively. Mitchell worships the River Thames, which features in both Stained Radiance and Thirteenth Disciple; the former novel sees beautiful London nights, "wrought of the Spring and the River" (SR, p.41) while Malcom in the latter novel joins a boating club and begins rowing from Chelsea to Mortlake (TD, p.227). Rowing in Oxford or Cambridge would run the risk of undermining Mitchell's radical leftist stance but on the London section of the Thames, where the river of beauty is also one of bustling urbanness, the implications are different.

London for Malcom is a place where he can row, where he can pursue scholarly interests (using particularly the British Museum), where he can establish contact with an archaeological society. When ready, he leaves London on an expedition to Central America. London can be squalid, as he and John Garland find out, but it is also beautiful. It is not the only place in the South-east given this kind of qualified approval by Mitchell. In the case of Gay Hunter, he follows Wells again to celebrate English topography, although the circumstances are markedly different from those of his first two novels.

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[2] Wells, Marriage (London, 1912), p.371.

2 Place-Names in The War of the Worlds and Gay Hunter

It is from Wells's The War of The Worlds that Mitchell seems to have taken inspiration for the writing of Gay Hunter. Wells's science fiction account is that of a world seemingly in the process of destruction; in Mitchell the destruction is long in the past. In The Early Wells, Bernard Bergonzi looks at the pre-Wells literature involving imagined invasions of England, generally not by Martians but by Germans: the not very inventive titles include The Invasion of England and How the Germans took London.[3] Wells is justifiably held to be vastly superior. However, in this fascinating emphasis on *fin de l'Angleterre* literature, Bergonzi fails to discuss the almost incantatory lists of English place-names in Wells. It is to be granted that in any description of invading forces moving through English territory, some indication of what is taking place where is needed. The obsessive listing found in War of the Worlds, though, is something else again. This is only one of a number of such lists:

> Behind in the park terraces and in the hundred other streets of that part of Marylebone, and the Westbourne Park district and St Pancras, and westward and northward to Kilburn and St John's Wood and Hampstead, and eastward in Shoreditch and Highbury and Haggerston and Hoxton, and indeed, through all the vastness of London from Ealing to East Ham -- people were rubbing their eyes.[4]

Small places take on special significance here; the presence of invading alien troops is amazing at Dover, fantastic in London but incredible in St John's Wood. For John Carey, "[m]uch of the excitement comes from place-names. The destruction is less a matter of human casualties than of postal districts being cleared."[5] Carey is half-right; one pauses at "postal districts", though. It is a pity if where he lives means so little to him.

Gay Hunter offers an equivalent small place, Pinner, to be remembered at all costs

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[3] Bergonzi, p.12.

[4] Wells, War of the Worlds, p.133.

[5] Carey, p.130.

despite enormous changes. Pinner is where Gay's friend the provincial-accented Nurse Geddes has her base. The novel begins and ends there in the present, sandwiching Gay's trip into a distant future where England has been all but destroyed by atomic war. In Pinner, amazingly, a field by the cottage still survives:

> Lovely, fantastic and terrible London! [. . .] Suddenly it came on her why that hay-field with the clover had seemed so familiar. Oh God, it couldn't be, and yet -- that was the hayfield behind Nurse Geddes' Cottage. Twenty thousand years -- and it had survived unchanged by chance or time. (p.175)

Not much else has, although London stays, albeit changed into a city dedicated to phallus-worship, dominated by Canary Wharf-like structures. London itself is mentioned over sixty times, along with a rage of other south-eastern landmarks: the Chilterns sixteen, the Thames six, Windsor four, Wiltshire three, Wokingham three; then an assortment of Netheravon, Upavon, Oxford, Cambridge, Sandhurst, Stonehenge, Pewsey, Paddington, Picadilly, Pinner, Chiswick, Hammersmith, Middlesex. All of this naming might be seen as an attempt by Gay to refamiliarise herself with a shockingly changed landscape. On the other hand, one can also read this in terms of Mitchell writing for a basically south-east English public. He is attempting, like Wells, to evoke personal echoes of at least a few of these places for each of his readers. Admittedly, the place-names here do not have a fictionalised layer, and thus lack the quality of the Quair's Scottish landscape, where, as W. Nicolaisen notes,

> Kinraddie and the place-names associated with it [Peesie's Nap, Blawearie, Cuddiestoun etc.] function as Mearns names, deriving their special Mearns characteristics from those actual place-names which surround them and entering convincingly the interrelated patterns of their onomastic field. The fictitious reality is made possible through Laurencekirk, Glenbervie and the Howe, just as Laurencekirk, Glenbervie and the Howe are given substance, are legitimised, in A Scots Quair through their relationship with Kinraddie.[6]

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[6] W.F.H. Nicolaisen, "An Onomastic Vernacular in Scottish Literature", in Derrick McClure (ed.), Scotland and the Lowland Tongue (Aberdeen, 1983), pp.209-18.

Less effort, obviously, has gone into constructing the landscape of Gay Hunter compared with that of Sunset Song; Mitchell is less confident in fleshing out the details of English geography and making up English names. He does see it as important, however, to carry his English place-names on thousands of years into the future but then wind up with Gay in the present, in "an England that was the living England of her own life-time"; all the English places mentioned on the way through have therefore been returned to her as yet undestroyed. She sees "the glow of London" with its "teeming streets" where "still men lived and hoped and dreamed" (GH, p.184). A search for the phrase "living Scotland" throughout Mitchell's work will draw a conspicuous blank.

3 Tono-Bungay and Image and Superscription: Chatham Revisited

> It was as if everything lay securely within a great warm friendly globe of crystal sky. It was as safe and enclosed and fearless as a child that has still to be born. It was an evening full of the quality of tranquil, unqualified assurance.[7]

These lines in Wells's History of Mr Polly (1910) act as a celebration of the parts of England, particularly Kent, where nothing much happens and peace reigns. Ambiguities may abound; the scene is *too* enclosed for the reader to be entirely at ease, and the image of the "child that still has to be born" suggests itself as a prelude to the anguish of birth. A little later, Polly remarks that "we can't sit here for ever".[8] Being the novel's last words, they become portentous and possibly allude to the feeling of crisis and apocalypse elsewhere in his work. The extent of even this limited idyll is fairly exceptional in Wells, his criticisms of provinciality normally outweighing his praise of the provinces. One thinks of the Chatham scenes in Tono-

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(215).

[7] Wells, The History of Mr Polly (London, 1910), p.368.

[8] Polly, p.374.

Bungay, where George Ponderevo has to stay with his uncle Nicodemus Frapp. Frapp is a baker who attends the Sunday worship of an extreme Christian sect consisting of "darkened and unclean people" in a "little back chapel". They are inevitable products of Chatham's geography and sociology:

> The impression [Chatham] left on my mind is one of squalid compression [. . .]. All its effects arranged themselves as antithetical to the Bladesover effects. Bladesover declared itself to be the land, to be essentially England; I have already told how its airy spaciousness, its wide dignity, seemed to thrust village, church and vicarage into corners [. . .]. Here one gathered the corollary of that. Since the whole wide country of Kent was made up of contiguous Bladesovers and for the gentlefolk, the surplus of population, all who were not good tenants, nor good labourers, Church of England [. . .] were necessarily thrust together, jostled out of sight, to fester as they might in this place that had the colours and even the smells of a well-packed dustbin.[9]

Mitchell revisits Wells's Chatham in Image and Superscription. Its hero, Gershom Jezreel, spends his early years in the neighbouring towns of Chatham and Gillingham. His father works as a baker (does this sound familiar?) and on Sundays attends the local bigoted and highly eccentric Christian Israelite sect (yes, it does). Fortunately for Gershom, his father dies of apoplectic rage, after being deserted by his long-suffering wife. Effectively orphaned, Gershom remains in Gillingham under the care of some neighbours, Bill and Ma Anderson. He learns to play and enjoy cricket in Chatham and has a pleasant boyhood in the area for a while. Gillingham is given an air of wholesomeness by several of Mitchell's descriptions:

> Scraps of singing rose from the houses in Magpie Hill Road. Men awakened from sleep and threw dark blankets from their bodies, and yawned, and thanked Christ it was Sunday. And the women they had lain with rose from those beds and prepared them food, and yawned, and were slow and rheumatic. And young girls rose up and robed their budding breasts in their Sunday finery, and answered with gaiety to the questionings if they thought the breakfast could be kept warm for them? (p.45)

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[9] Wells, Tono-Bungay (London, 1909), p.52.

The mood here is almost pastoral, an interlude between Gershom's father's rages and the horror of the Great War some time later. Gershom and the Andersons are scarred by the War (the latter lose a son on a submarine and become psychologically damaged) but Magpie Hill Road continues to have the noise of girls and boys playing in it as before (p.242). Mitchell has snatched a few details of Kent town life from that perpetual source, Wells's fiction, and glossed it more positively.

Life goes on in the Kent town; it goes on, too, in the Hertfordshire countryside. While still in post-war shock, Gershom randomly gets on a train and finds himself visiting Mitchell's home town of Welwyn. He walks away from the station

> and walked and walked till late in the day in the rich wooded lands round the heights of Herts. And he saw it was Spring, the teams out in the fields, the sun was a bright spring shining, you could hear in the rustle of the paths, hidden in the woods, the streams trilling their ways newborn from the overnight rains. Larks were out, shrilling over the labour of the plodding teams, in green and ochre lay the fields about him, walking slow, without thought, with the feeling of a prisoner escaped. (p.191)

The scene suggests a debt to Edward Thomas's "As the team's head brass"[10] just as his descriptions of war itself suggest much in Sassoon and Owen.[11] Angus Calder suggests that Thomas's poem signals the end of a certain English way of life in the penultimate words "for the last time";[12] it is, however, a highly equivocal poem, given that English country life goes on despite the war. As with Mitchell: on the one hand, Gershom despairingly asks how can people possibly live in this tranquillity during the madness of World War; on the other, they do, and show no

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10 Edward Thomas, "As The Team's Head Brass", in Complete Poems (Oxford, 1978), p.325.

11 See I and S and TD for scenes of the crucified soldier. Compare soldier-as-Christ motif with Siegfried Sassoon, "The Redeemer" and "Golgotha", in The Old Huntsman and Other Poems (London, 1917), p.22 and p.19 respectively; and with Wilfred Owen, "Apologia Pro Poemate Meo" and "At a Calvary Near the Ancre", in Collected Poems (London, 1972), p.39 and p.82.

12 Angus Calder, Englishness (Milton Keynes, 1991), p.31.

signs of impending change. English tranquillity gives him a much-needed respite. The countryside and the spirit of England somehow continue. What the spirit of England, often clumsily presented, is doing in the novels of an expatriate Scot is an unavoidable question.

4 Tradition and The English Talent

The influence of Wells is again a reason for what goes on. A number of his novels seem first of all to attack or annul a set of traditional British beliefs or reasons for British pride before suddenly introducing something, as if from nowhere, which thematises the impressiveness of the British or English nation. A good example is a novel such as Joan and Peter, probably vitiated by Great War patriotism (it was published in 1918). The early part of the book reveals the hopeless backwardness of its upper and governing classes and the shoddiness of the British education system. The boy Peter goes to an awful public school and encounters the apparently worthless school bully, Probyn. Come the Great War, however, Probyn gets the Military Medal and Victoria Cross and is worshipped by his men. Looking back at his school, it is concluded that "whatever there was to be learnt there, he learnt".[13] An indefinable something at his appalling alma mater has taught him to bear up like an Englishman. Later, at the novel's close, Uncle Oswald wishes to make a speech to Peter and his sister Joan, who are now grown up, in which he will glorify his native race and tradition:

> I do not mean the brief tradition of this little Buckingham Palace and Westminster system that began yesterday and will end to-morrow. I mean the great tradition of the English that is spread over all the earth, the tradition of Shakespeare and Milton, of Newton and Bacon, of Runnymede and Agincourt, the tradition of the men who speak fairly and act fairly [. . .] who face whatever odds there are against them and take no account of kings.[14]

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13 Wells, Joan and Peter (London, 1918), p.653.

14 ibid, p.715.

A few pages on, he returns to this theme, believing that an English tradition existed before church and state corrupted it. (When?) Its key men are now Shakespeare, Milton, Raleigh, and Blake (p.717). This sort of material might be regarded as wartime-inspired nonsense, although it also appears in The Passionate Friends of 1912. Its protagonist, Stephen Stratton, writes to his son about the snobbery and stupidity of the "governing English", home and abroad, pointing out that:

> They are not England, they are not the English reality, which is a thing at once bright and illuminating and fitful, a thing humorous and wise and adventurous -- Shakespeare, Dickens, Newton, Darwin, Nelson, Bacon, Shelley -- English names every one -- like the piercing light of lanterns [. . .].[15]

Again, then, the evacuation of categories of English quality is followed by a re-occupation of them. The end of our exploration of the themes of national identity will be to arrive where we started and to know the place for the first time. The real England consists of scientists who have revolutionised our understanding of the universe; of the occasional admiral; of radical writers, with Shakespeare co-opted among their number. A list specifically composed of supposed radicals occurs in The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman, where the Wells-surrogate Wilkins discusses English literary men: "We are, by our very nature, a collection of scandals -- we must be. Bacon, Shakespeare, Byron, Shelley -- all the stars".[16]

A national tradition comprising Wells's favourites is thus assembled, standing apart from all the corrupt versions. Gay Hunter conceives of a less radical but still interesting tradition when she reflects on the passage of time in England: "The England of Shakespeare, Newton, Avebury: it had ended in nakedness, brown skins, and a bow." (GH, p.53 -- "Avebury" refers to an archaeologist[17]). Of course,

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[15] Wells, The Passionate Friends (London, 1913), p.235.

[16] Wells, The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman (London, 1914), p.319.

[17] John Lubbock, Lord Avebury (1834-1913), polymath and archaeologist.

Gay is to find out that nakedness, brown skins and a bow are exceedingly good things to end up with; nevertheless, the value judgement on the England of science and literature is not withdrawn. Mitchell is actually aware of the dangers of turning a jumble of figures into a tradition, as he shows in his essay on Ramsay MacDonald:

> The conviction of the continuity of culture became fixed in his mind -- the mind which could lump "Cromwell, Milton, Hampden, Penn, Burke" as "the best in the life of England"! (ScSc, p.100)

However, Mitchell himself plays a dangerous game in setting store by English mystics such as Blake. His use of the final four lines of the complex anarchist manifesto "Jerusalem" does not free the poem from its connotations of use as a mindless public-school patriotic anthem:

> It seemed a new London gathered in the skies -- pylons and towers and ranging temples illuminated for a moment blood-red. Then the colour faded from them [. . .].
> Not London. Perhaps instead it had been what Blake once saw -- what was a vision and a possibility in the days when he sang it, before man lost his vision completely.
>
> I shall not cease from mental fight
> Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
> Till we have built Jerusalem
> In England's green and pleasant land. (p.165)

London and its surrounding area had their vices in Blake's time, have them in Mitchell's, have them in Gay's future time; they still have an English vision and a dream. It is all very well for progressives such as Zagratzki to praise Mitchell for his use of a politically correct writer such as Blake,[18] but the lines' nationalist reverberations remain largely unaffected by Mitchell's or Zagratzki's earnest anarchist intent.

Publications include On the Origins of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man (London, 1875). See Who Was Who 1897-1915, 6th ed. 1938.

[18] Zagratzki, p.127.

English dreaming, again making use of a vulgarised Blake, is also to be found in The Thirteenth Disciple. Malcom's superior officer and lover John Metaxa recalls the time he spent as a fugitive in South Arabia when his comrades had been savagely killed. After a horrible few days, a particular morning impresses him. He stands in it, filthy and sobbing,

> and suddenly had a vision of England -- God knows why, for I hadn't seen it for years. Not the real England at all, of course, but Blake's green and pleasant land, where women were white and kindly and purchasable and no men hunted the roads with superannuated Mausers. A vision. I followed it. (TD, p.136)

> [I felt] wonder that those English fields and hedges should stand on the verge of sleep and not know the thing, that I knew I might never see them again! (p.140)

Not London, not England; the trick of phrasing in Mitchell comes very probably from Wells. The obvious difference between the writers lies in the fact that Wells's supposedly genuine England, what is not not-England, is the admired, sought-for object, a real England one has, perhaps, to excavate literature and history to discover (like MacDiarmid's Scotland). Mitchell's sought-for object is the *un*genuine article, the vision and the dream of Blake and company, an England that might yet be created. Both, however, are interested in marrying patriotism with powerful myth. Wells does know better than this. The man who organised the writing of The Outline of History has to be aware that, to go back to the Joan and Peter extract, a pre-Westminster English tradition is dubious and Runnymede should be interpreted on the lines of 1066 And All That, as primarily to the English barons' advantage rather than to anyone else's, though Margaret Thatcher believes that we did not need a bloody revolution in 1789 because we had a peaceful one in 1215.[19] Mitchell also should know better than to glorify England, but does it repeatedly, though slightly more obliquely.

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[19] W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman, 1066 And All That, (London, 1930), pp.33-34.
For Margaret Thatcher reference, see The Times, July 14 1989, p.16.

Three Go Back sees him genuflect towards key elements in English literary tradition. Its heroine Clair Stranlay, trapped in uncomfortable circumstances in the distant past, goes through an extraordinary sequence of poetry recollections. There is the Authorised Version's rendering of John 3:16 ("For God so loved the world [. . .]."") followed by the evening hymn "Father, in thy gracious keeping" and then excerpts from Tennyson's In Memoriam. These are all "phrases . . . lovely and gracious and shining" (p.193). Later on Clair sings songs for the Golden Men, including Tennyson's "Now sleeps the crimson petal" and that perennial Cup-Final favourite "Abide with me" (pp. 235-36). This Golden Treasury in miniature might be seen as a dry run for the decidedly more apposite use of a range of Scots lyrics for Chris's marriage celebration in Sunset Song. While romanticising Kinraddie has its own dangers, the village does have the advantage for Mitchell in that spoken poetry is quite natural to the community, and does not have the jarring effect it does when Clair Stranlay attempts some. The poetry festival of Three Go Back will only embarrass English readers. Mitchell has taken English literary pride too far here; Wells does not make this kind of mistake, despite the ridiculousness of his lists of names and his patriotic rhapsodising.

There is more where this rhapsodising came from, though. When Oswald thinks of his address to his protégés in Joan and Peter, of the tradition of men who, as we saw earlier, "speak fairly and act fairly" and "take no account of kings", it is a tradition not simply confined to our isles, but one extending to "Washington and New York and Christchurch and Sydney, just as much as [. . .] Pelham Ford".[20] Wells's English decency and fair play stretches around the globe. Mitchell has a passage in "Glasgow" along similar lines, but written with a slightly different tone, in which he champions "English common sense" and "English ideals: decency, freedom, justice, ideals innate in the mind of man, as common to the Bantu as to the Kentishman --" (ScSc, p.146) If these ideals are so innate, why are they necessarily

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[20] Joan and Peter, p.715.

"English"? The immediate context of this involves Mitchell's desire to destroy the arguments advanced by extremists for "Everything English" to be kicked out of Scotland come independence. This is to include, in his *reductio ad absurdum*, the English language, English fashions, and English ideals. The force of Mitchell's argument with regard to the last item seems to be that because the English, like everyone else, possess these (innate) "ideals", and these ideals are good ones, not everything English is bad. One also might infer, though, that the ideals are English because, though they are innate to all, the English have allowed the freest expressions and explorations of them. Countless writers other than Wells would have supported the idea of English decency conquering the world; rather fewer did this under the cover of scourging jingoism, imperialism and the like; no others were read with such avidity by the young Mitchell.

5 England versus Scotland

One reaction to this documenting of resemblances between Wells and Mitchell in English patriotism would be to write off some of the extracts quoted above from Stained Radiance, Thirteenth Disciple, and Gay Hunter as lightweight material, derivative from the lightweight in Wells. Mitchell, with his eye often on a south-eastern readership, is producing alongside a robust socio-political creed the stuff which he hopes will sell. We should therefore not be particularly interested in this material, but should concern ourselves with his writing of lasting value which, by and large, concerns Scotland. This objection may be answered in a number of ways. First, Stained Radiance and Thirteenth Disciple, despite their obvious flaws, are worth reading for their wit, relevance to the political and literary thirties, and occasional descriptive power, as Uwe Zagratzki has demonstrated.[21] What happens to Englishness in these novels deserves attention in the first place simply due to

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[21] Zagratzki, chapter 2, pp.17-84.

value by association. Second, Mitchell's writing on Scotland, sometimes contradictory and confusing, is put into crucial perspective by looking at his writing on England. Why are there visions of the English future but not of the Scottish future, for instance? Thirdly, one must be careful in what one claims to be exclusively Scottish. For several critics, his Scottish writing is his real writing, and when any emotion or quality is manifest elsewhere it must be the Scottish influence. William Malcolm takes such a line:

> Mitchell's fiction also illustrates his pride in his country of origin [. . .]. Sunset Song constitutes just as emotional and explicit a tribute to his native Mearns as [. . .] "The Land"; similarly, it is surely beyond coincidence that he should resort to this kind of landscape description throughout even his earliest published work, in [. . .] Stained Radiance, Thirteenth Disciple, Image and Superscription -- all, significantly, boasting Scottish interludes. Occasionally Mitchell represents his feelings more directly in his English stories, referring knowingly in "A Footnote to History" to "that aching land-love inherited from generations of hillmen-peasants", which surely harks back nostalgically to his own roots in the Mearns. And in "The Epic" Mitchell sympathises with his expatriate narrator's innate sense of "the quiet, secure things" of life which he romantically defines as, "autumn and stars and English [*sic*] fields, and smell of ploughed lands, and kindly peasant song."[22]

If some of this Ian Munro *cum* Ivor Brown stylistic indulgence is momentarily justifiable in tracing probabilities of elements of feeling, Malcolm's "*sic*" is a shade too definitive, too set against devolving Scottish literature. After all, it is just possible that Mitchell had seen some English fields by 1929.

Malcolm might have found cause to doubt Mitchell's meaning in that fairly Scottish work Niger: The Life of Mungo Park, by "Lewis Grassic Gibbon". Very early on, we find Park "cowardly as only a Scotsman can be cowardly" (p.16). This is Scottish pride speaking: Mitchell has no idea how cowardly Australians or Argentinians can be; he nevertheless suggests that he will claim the greatest virtues, excesses, or deficiencies as Scottish. To be Scottish is to be generic. Yet near the

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[22] Malcolm, book, p.7.

end, when Park returns home and meets his friends, he "stared at them with that passionate delight no traveller knows to such full ecstasy as the Englishman returned from his wanderings" (p.250). Englishman? What was Mitchell thinking of? Have the English become suddenly more generic during Park's time away? Has he become English by sheer hard work? A wish in this instance to do some decisive rewriting would be more understandable.

Gordon Watt's desire to rewrite Mitchell stands on shakier ground. He condemns Image and Superscription for its second person singular narrative and its heady rhythms: such devices are "too firmly associated with the Scottish trilogy" to "work for a boy from English Kent".[23] Such criticism as this is richly suggestive of structural oppositions between England and Scotland; for example:

England	**Scotland**
distance	intimacy
restraint	romanticism
dissociated sensibilities	organic rural rhythms

Watt's implied oppositions suggest an aestheticised, depoliticised, contorted but nevertheless recognisable version of Frantz Fanon's oppositional code for national inferiority complexes generated originally by colonial powers, as quoted by Beveridge and Turnbull in their list of Scotland/ England pairings, including "parochial/ cosmopolitan; uncouth/ refined; intemperate/ moderate; savage/ mild".[24] It is not wrong of Watt to suggest that certain pairings exist in Mitchell, as one does see the following:

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[23] Watt, p.146.

[24] Beveridge and Turnbull, p.7.

England	**Scotland**
reason	emotion
(most prominently in Stained Radiance and "The Land")	
male	female
(explored through the Quair in most detail by Carol Anderson, whose work cites Alasdair Gray's cry in 1982 Janine that "SCOTLAND HAS BEEN FUCKED") [25]	
authority	sensitivity
(as suggested by Roderick Watson) [26]	
historical	ahistorical
(deriving from the closing scenes in Grey Granite, noted by Cairns Craig) [27]	

To discuss this material in more detail would be to touch on ground already substantially covered by others. The interest in this chapter lies not so much in the existing Scottish-English tropes so much as in Mitchell's revisions of, or complicity with them (conscious or otherwise) and the subsequent critical reworkings carried out on Mitchell. It should be noted at this stage that terms such as "civilised" and "refined", generally assumed to be on the positive side of whatever oppositions are being made, are often attacked by Mitchell, despite the fact that, as we have seen, he attacks Scotland for being backward in various other ways, literary and ideological. To return to Watt: his sin is to imply that oppositions should be categorically assigned across Mitchell's work with no possibility of compromise, so that the English fiction cannot share certain devices with the Scottish (as does William

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25 Anderson, p.386, quoting Gray's 1982, Janine (London, 1984), p.281.

26 Roderick Watson, The Literature of Scotland (London, 1984), p.393.

27 See Cairns Craig, "The Body in the Kitbag: History and the Scottish Novel", in Cencrastus (Autumn, 1979), pp.18-22.

Malcolm in another way, quoted a little earlier).

The oppositions in Mitchell's writing between England and Scotland can be summarised crudely in the following way: the Scottish land had something it now lacks: the Scottish city is irredeemable. Life in South-East England is not a continual golden pathway, but it is liveable in a way that Scottish existence is not, and occasional momentary visions of a better future exist. While the political future for Mitchell in the 1930s lay generally in attempting to achieve material improvements in the lives of the working classes (globally, at his most idealistic, with Ewan campaigning against chemical weapons going overseas), he remained in quiet English Welwyn until his death, with plans on the drawing-board to produce imaginative blockbusters covering various stirring episodes in Scottish history.[28]

Mitchell disapproves of the general phenomenon of expatriates writing about the old country. In his unpublished "Satire on Lowland Scots" he creates the character of one Wallace Mongour (the "Wallace" is heavily ironic) who lives in Hampstead, edits a variety of Scottish material, and presides over various expatriate gatherings, yet, embarrassed about his birthright, has sold out on the question of the use of Scots in literature, bleating that it is suitable only for "the ruder humours of the bothy".[29] For Tom Nairn, directing abuse against lone expatriate figures is a waste of time. Such exiles should not be seen as examples of individual betrayal but as structural inevitabilities in the relationship between England and Scotland. The exodus from Scotland has gone on since James Thomson in the eighteenth century down to this century's George Douglas Brown, "Wallace Mongour", and Lewis Grassic Gibbon.[30] Edwin Muir comes close to the specifics of the Mongour description; he lived in Hampstead, and Mitchell is quoted by MacDiarmid in Lucky Poet as calling Muir's attitude to the language question "anaemic blah".[31] The

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[28] See chapter 3, note 5 on Wallace and the Covenanters.

[29] "A satire on Lowland Scots", NLS MS 26059.

[30] Nairn, p.156.

[31] Hugh MacDiarmid recalls Mitchell writing on Edwin Muir's "anaemic blah"over

similarity between Mongour and Mitchell, though, is in certain respects a touch close to home. If he differs from Mongour in the trenchancy of his criticisms of present-day Scotland and in his belief in the potential of Scots as one linguistic medium, Mitchell too may be seen as a London-based Scot who made numerous attempts to assimilate to the possible demands of a South-Eastern readership.

Conclusion to Chapters 2 and 3

In Mitchell's greatest works, the Quair and essays, he tries to anatomise Scotland. England is never given sustained treatment of this nature; this does point towards more serious interest in his native country. The rougher treatment he gives Scotland may be seen as an indication of greater worry, a greater feeling of the need to shock and provoke. The Quair continually aims at manipulating the emotions of the reader to this end or that, most notoriously when Chris meets Ewan's ghost, when Robert dies at the pulpit, or when Ewan junior is beaten up by Duncairn's police. It also aims to shock and disgust by its portrayal of the viciousness of country gossip and the ugliness of its characters before the urban hopelessness of Grey Granite. The Quair is perhaps written with the greatest emotional intensity in the fiction; this may be seen partly as the powerful outworking of memory from childhood, and partly in terms of the adult Mitchell fully consciously trying to galvanise Scots into looking at their country anew. The nearest counterpart to this in his descriptions of England is in Stained Radiance, where, finally, the fight for justice continues in a manner surer than that suggested at the end of Grey Granite. One of the reasons for this could be that Mitchell was more optimistic about political struggle in 1930 than in 1934; there are hazards in taking the largely synchronic approach adopted by this thesis as a whole and by the last two chapters in particular. As we have seen, though, the essays in Scottish Scene, also published in 1934, do not damn England but do damn

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the archaic nature of Braid Scots in Lucky Poet (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1972), p.21.

Scottish life.

With regard to the fiction, Mitchell is caught in a variation of the Scottish tropes identified by Cairns Craig in his Cencrastus article on Scottish film, where he argues that the myths created of the Scottish homeland are "myths of the end of the very culture whose being they are supposed to express":

> Whether it is the defeated Jacobite Highlander resurrected into tartan sentimentality, or the displaced peasant or artisan community rescued from the grave into harmonious kailyard nostalgia, the defeat of whatever values they might represent is inscribed into their structure. Brought to life again they can only relive their death [. . .].[32]

Sunset Song is in Douglas Gifford's phrase, the Song of Death.[33] the rest of the trilogy carries the hearse of what was Kinraddie life through the spiritually bankrupt Scottish town and city; the coffin finally thuds down gravewards in the last lines of the last book, as Chris merges with the land. The Speak of the Mearns, were it to continue, would most likely have seen either exile to England or deadness in a place equivalent to Duncairn.

The myths of the end with which Mitchell struggles do not occur south of the border in, say, the last two centuries except in "regional" novels such as those of Thomas Hardy.[34] England as such in literary fiction does not experience such dead ends. Wells, fearful of national and global apocalypse and satirical of existing society though he is, offers Mitchell a spirit of optimism in numerous novels: if there is fear for the nation in War of the Worlds, loathing in Tono-Bungay and confusion in Marriage, each novel also suggests that a spirit of progress is at work. Mitchell draws on Wells's fear, loathing, and confusion for source material in Gay Hunter,

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32 Cairns Craig, "Visitors from the Stars: Scottish Film Culture", in Cencrastus (New Year, 1983), pp.6-11 (8).

33 Gifford, chapter title, "Sunset Song and the Song of Death", p.71.

34 One example in Hardy would be The Woodlanders (London, 1887) in which an organic peasant community is changed by forces of economics, technology and class.

Image and Superscription and Stained Radiance, but draws on Wells's positive side for the way he glosses such material. Wells's visions of real England in the patriotic novels are refracted into visions of ideal England at Mitchell's apparent whim.

Visions for a better Scottish future were available, even if rather hazily, in MacDiarmid's "A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle". Whatever their dire present and recent past, Scots must create themselves anew, combining the best of their historical attributes with a new, complex self-understanding based on MacDiarmid's Golden Treasury of European philosophy and literature. The thistle rises, supposedly, and forever will. Mitchell has little truck with these ideas. The main literary-philosophical visionary creeds he has time for are to be found in a selective reading of English past masters such as Shelley, Morris, and Blake. The last of these carries with him what has been taken by large numbers of readers as his New English Jerusalem. (Mitchell does, though, satirise the analogous romanticism of William Morris repeatedly, e.g. in Grey Granite.) The New Jerusalem, in both the Bible and in Mitchell, would reach out to the whole world.

There are places for recording Mitchell's love for his native country, and other places (hopefully more) for recording the energy of his iconoclastic radicalism. The embarrassing extent of Mitchell's engagement with, and praise for, things English has been pointed out in this chapter in a bid to challenge certain formulaic and sloganising aspects of Mitchell criticism. The next chapter, partially inspired by The Eclipse of Scottish Culture and Edward Said's Orientalism,[35] will explore further Mitchell's entanglement in Anglocentrism with regard to the rest of the world in his fiction and non-fiction, examining, for instance, the rhetoric associated with Western conceptions of the Orient, and contextualising his inspirational rhetoric, as found in the Glasgow essay, which envisions a Cosmopolitan City of God.

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35 Edward Said, Orientalism (Harmondsworth, 1978).

Chapter 4: The Rest of the World

> And outside it was all an antrin world, full of coarse folk from the north and south.
>
> The Speak of the Mearns, p.25

Introduction

The decidedly Anglophile streak in many of the novels cannot be denied. Mitchell has, though, been taken by some at his own valuation: as all-round Cosmopolitan man. He outlines his supranational vision most boldly at the close of the essay on Glasgow:

> Glasgow's salvation, Scotland's salvation, the world's salvation lies in neither nationalism nor internationalism, those twin halves of an idiot whole. It lies in ultimate cosmopolitanism, the earth the City of God, the Brahmaputra and Easter Island as free and familiar to the man from Govan as the Molendinar and Bute. A time will come when the self-wrought, prideful differentiations of Scotsman, Englishman, Frenchman and Spaniard will seem as ludicrous as the infantile squabblings of the Heptarchians. A time will come when nationalism, with other cultural aberrations, will have passed from the human spirit, when Man, again free and unchained, has all the earth for his footstool, sings his epics in a language moulded from the best on earth, draws his heroes, his sunrises, his valleys and his mountains from all the crinkles of this lovely planet . . . . (ScSc, p.146)

This passage appears in 1934, the same year which sees his examination in The Conquest of the Maya of the most complex civilisation among the Indians of Central America, an account in Niger of Mungo Park's exploration of West Africa, and a series of potted explorers' biographies -- from Leif Ericssen to Fridtjof Nansen -- in Nine against the Unknown. Works antedating these include Hanno (1928), a survey of the future of world exploration by land, sea and air, The Calends of Cairo (1930) and Persian Dawns, Egyptian Nights (1932), collections each of twelve stories set in the East, and The Lost Trumpet (1932), a novel set in Cairo. Elsewhere in the fiction, John Garland gets as far as Egypt and Bethlehem in Stained Radiance, and

Malcom Maudslay and Gershom Jezreel go to Central America in The Thirteenth Disciple and Image and Superscription respectively. Mitchell's keen attention to where Scottish-made chemical weapons actually go (i.e. the third world) in the Quair marks him out as a rarity among more Eurocentric contemporary leftist writers.

Mitchell goes to great lengths to advocate Cosmopolitanism; even his style reflects this, at the level of the sentence or of the individual word. He frequently makes use of scientific terminology and generally adopts the casual and professorial air of a man at ease with a range of foreign histories and cultures:

> But no Scottish image of personification may display, even distortedly, the essential Glasgow. One might go further afield, to the tortured imaginings of the Asiatic mind, to find her likeness -- many-armed Siva, with her waistlet of skulls, or Xipe of Ancient America, whose priest skinned the victim alive, and then clad himself in the victim's skin . . . . (ScSc, p.136)

> Marco, indefatigably curious, observed the ways and customs of the Sinhalese, their worship of Sogomon-Barchan -- a strange corruption of Sakya-Muniburchan, itself almost meaningless in its admixture of Hindustani and Mongol -- the divine Sage God. This was the Buddha. (NAU p.79)

Elsewhere, he makes more of an effort to mediate in at least a token way between conspicuously foreign material and the reader, as he does with a range of African names, and with Central American Indian chiefs:

> Ahtzinteyut-chan, Tzuntecum, Taxcal, Pantemit, Xuchucuet, Itzuat, and Kakaltecat were the leaders of this Mexican horde, and the seven sweet symphonies boom menacingly, if a trifle meaninglessly, across the history of those days. (CoM, p.221)

Certain fictional characters of Mitchell's, such as Gershom Jezreel in Image and Superscription, see it is a sign of worth and value to know about exotic cultures from one's reading. Incidentally revealing the knowledge that Huitzilopochtli was the Aztec war-god qualifies Gershom for love and education from his archaeologist uncle (p.51). The number of exotic names crammed into Mitchell's work is

immense; the range of his magpie eclecticism is obvious in much of his work, particularly the essays. Yet despite all this, there are certain senses in which Cosmopolitanism is not enough. The learned world tour on which his work takes us is even more fraught with difficulties of representation than his attempts to show an authentic Scotland. His individual brand of libertarian leftism surely demands a substantial effort to avoid at least the grosser errors of racial prejudice, yet this runs against his penchant for attempting to entertain, amuse, or overbear by polemical generalisation on whatever subject lies to hand. And his espousal of the creed of Diffusionism provides Mitchell an opportunity to vilify anyone he chooses, with the covering excuse that all nations (except the Golden Age Hunters) are tainted horribly with the disease of civilisation.

Mitchell's curiosity about racial divergence could be defended in terms of his interest in a number of different nations' histories and practices, which is most evident in the non-fiction. Such interest, though, is also in pursuit of slightly different ends. Malcom Maudslay in The Thirteenth Disciple learns the Mayan language and lore in the pursuit of his "purpose and dream" of finding some shard of truth about Diffusionism, and most importantly of going beyond the horizon or the sunset (TD, p.226) where no "modern white" has gone before (TD, p.273) as so many of his and Leslie Mitchell's heroes have done.

1 Exploration

1.1 Nine Against The Unknown

Introducing his catalogue of explorers in Nine Against The Unknown, Mitchell stresses the common aim shared by them: "Leif Ericssen and and Fridtjof Nansen, separated by a space of nine hundred years, both quested the unattainable same. They did it under different names and guises: the essence remained" (p.18). If one compares this with the comment on Leif's goodbye scene with his wife -- "One

peers down those caverns of the years to seek into motives and hopes and repulsions long not even a flicker in human thought" (p.27) -- the logical conclusion must be that this urge to quest the unattainable is substantially greater than that human love or hate.

J. H. Parry's history of exploration between 1450 and 1650 identifies the basic motives for exploration at that time as "acquisitiveness and religious zeal".[1] Mitchell does admit this with Columbus, criticising extensively the man whose five-hundredth anniversary was lavishly celebrated in 1992. Christopher Columbus/ Don Christobal Colon's motives involve gold, slaves, and high prestige in Spain rather than sailing beyond the sunset. Furthermore Mitchell tells us that he "was to develop into one of the world's greatest liars" (p.90). This is stressed in a way foreign to that of his source in English, Cecil Jane's Voyages of Christopher Columbus,[2] which attempts generally to mitigate its subject's faults. Mitchell emphasises that the members of the junta who initially rejected his planned voyage were not flat-earthers, as represented by Columbus, but merely rightly sceptical at his estimates of India's nearness (p.94). He often wishes to switch away from Columbus' myopic perspective:

> The scene may be best seen through the eyes of the islanders of Guanahani [description of strange goings-on involving white sailors follows]. By signs Columbus gathered that the name of the island was Guanahani. Calmly obliterating its name, even as he had annexed its territory, he re-christened it San Salvador. (p.101)

A short time later Columbus arrives at Guadeloupe where cannibalism is practised. The Spaniards, of course, revile the islanders as unnatural and devilish, despite their own habit of burning at the stake. Again, Mitchell takes up the islanders' cause:

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[1] J. H. Parry, The Age of Reconnaissance: Discovery, Exploration, and Settlement 1450-1650 (London, 1973), p.35.

[2] Cecil Jane, The Voyages of Christopher Columbus (London, 1930).

> Large animals which could be used for food had become scarce in the lesser Antilles: anthropophagy, inaugurated by religious ritual, had become an economic way of salvation. But the Spaniards knew nothing of these facts. (p.109)

Operating on some system of essentialism, cruder no doubt than Mitchell's yet probably in some ways comparable, the Spaniards believe that normal human beings refrain from eating each other, and thus assume Guadeloupe to be markedly abnormal. Perhaps more culpably, on that island's example the Spaniards then conceptually lump a range of islands together as cannibalistic ones, to the extreme disadvantage of the innocent Bahamas. This provides a justification for the enslavement and maltreatment of all the tribes that they come across, even to the outrage of the queen of Spain.

Of Mitchell's explorers, Columbus is by far the worst offender against indigenous populations, both in terms of his own direct actions and in terms of the consequent history of genocides still continuing to the present. Ferdinand Magellan ranks second on the list of offenders, conquering and plundering in a round-the-world colonial debauch. Not surprisingly, Mitchell once more looks towards the islanders' perspective: when the Portugese/ Spanish crews reach Guam of the Mariannes, some goods are stolen from their boats there. In retaliation, Magellan burns down the nearest village, kills the only seven men he can lay hands on, and lays waste to what else he can; "Magellan christened the islands the Ladrones, the Islands of Thieves; what the inhabitants christened Magellan history leaves unrecorded" (p.188).

Mitchell never represents any ethnic group anywhere as benefitting from contact with a technologically superior expedition of foreigners. Contact is generally followed by conquest which is followed by continuing exploitation. The story of Cabez de Vaca's adventures in North and South America is not an exception to this, despite the relatively good intentions of "one of the least prejudiced" (p.167) of the nine. On the other hand, Marco Polo has little opportunity to plunder, due to the three-man nature of his extraordinary journey to the court of Kublai Khan. There is

nothing for Fridtjof Nansen to conquer except Arctic ice; the fulfilment of this romantic dream is achieved with minimal harm to anyone. But Mitchell's general glorification of exploration, given its chequered history, is puzzling. If an understandable ambivalence pervades his treatment of the subject, it could be further extended, with a keener, critical self-consciousness. Michael McGrath suggests that Mitchell tries to show that exploration involves an "unconscious or sub-conscious compliance with some underlying force or principle", which is the repetition of the centrifugal energies which initially diffused civilisation around the world.[3] There is, however, no clear evidence for this link, and the mood in which Mitchell writes Hanno, his earlier book on the theme of exploration is one basically of great optimism.

1.2 Hanno

Exploration's future is still alive with possibilities. What has been achieved is certainly globally incomplete in Mitchell's 1928:

> As yet our earth is largely *terra incognita*, not only to the Mediterranean peoples, the whites, but to all mankind. Even its surface, so largely mapped and confident, with its radio stations, its air-routes, its steamship-lines, has kinks and belts and desert and jungle waste untrodden by any Caucasian. There are still mountains to climb, rivers to cross, ruins to unearth and scripts to decipher. There are still shores and islands in the great ocean rifts unvisited by ship or sail, unstrewn with trippers' banana-skins, unawakened by the sounds of the phonograph. (p.20)

It is hard to tell whether the banana-skins and phonograph are mere sardonic afterthoughts tossed in at random, or represent serious ambiguities. The same pattern is repeated later on, when approval has initially been given for overland exploration in a specifically Australian context:

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[3] McGrath, p.72.

> The coming of the government geographer is little likely to be delayed, for Australia is a progressive state, with slums, strikebreakers, and imperial aspirations, and cannot long tolerate a tract of the primeval at its back door. (pp. 46-47)

It is surprising that these thoughts are developed no further, even given the limits of space in the booklet format of the "Today and Tomorrow" series in which he was writing. An important part of tomorrow, surely, involves what happens in newly "discovered" territories. As he knows only too well, cultural exchange between "old" and "new" worlds is always asymmetrical, the old obliterating the new, while taking to itself only a fraction of what the new might have had to offer. Mitchell's tone is strangely encouraging in the circumstances.

It is true that he does not encourage whites exploring Africa. They have got it wrong in the past, and need "some more understanding of the tribes of the interior". This is to be achieved by others first, Europeans later:

> For some time to come it is probable that any exploration of account will need to be made by the educated Moslem of the type of Hussanein Bey.
> With respect to the somewhat readily stirred Moslem imagination, it must be admitted that such explorations are likely to remain unproductive of accurate mapping and recording. To-morrow, when Europeanisation is no longer synonymous with machine-gunning and concession-grabbing, the explorer will find a field of venture well worth the outlay of patience and diplomacy which its exploration is likely to exact. (p.37)

Tomorrow the totally impartial and culturally relativistic exploration team; today the pillage. It would be unfair to expect Mitchell to set a date for tomorrow. One does wonder, however, about his boundless optimism in the speculation that we might learn and benefit from a technically superior civilisation of Martians or Venusians. His excitement for discovery is boundless in picturing a Mars landing and revelling once more in the exotic and otherwordly:

> Within the next few years they of the blood and tradition of Hanno, daring the unknown in a staggering voyage forty million miles from home, may yet attain the great Thamusian

> desert, drift in light aircraft across the reddish sands to the Solis Lucus, achieve communication with the Areians of the great oases, reach the Tithonian Canal and follow its course down to the Tithonian Lucus, drifting under the bright Martian stars and the shrunken Martian sun, above Nilotic strips of swamp and cultivation and tawny waste; watch, in a creeping red Martian twilight, the upspringing of strange lights and infernal challenges. (Hanno, p.93)

What if the Martians or Venusians simply decided to exploit us instead when we made contact? In Wells's War of the Worlds, the narrator recalls:

> It is curious to recall some of the mental habits of those departed days. At most, terrestrial men fancied there might be other men on Mars, perhaps inferior to themselves and ready to welcome a missionary enterprise. Yet, across the gulf of space, minds that are to our minds those of the beasts that perish, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic regarded this earth with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew their plans against us.[4]

Mitchell avoids speculation along such lines apart from an aside in Stained Radiance in which a character imagines Martians building canals and being frighteningly more technologically advanced than ourselves (p.36). It is, though, a typical Mitchell aside which is not followed up. He is, ultimately, concerned with humans more than Martians, and tries to show, however hamfistedly, the humanity of those with whom Western explorers have come into contact.

1.3 Niger

Mungo Park's famous African journey exploring the Niger has attracted the attention of several chroniclers. Mitchell stresses, as no other biographer does, his superiority to Park in terms of greater knowledge and larger vision. Mitchell is not a repressed Calvinist, with all that that entails. Mitchell has a sense of humour; and can use a colloquial turn of phrase, despite his partial complicity with the waffle of Scots

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[4] Wells, The War of the Worlds, p.2.

using English. One of Mungo's attributes, however, does earn great respect: the belief in a broad version of humanist essentialism. Witnessing a highly emotional scene in which an African mother weeps to see her son return after thinking him lost, Park comments:

> From this interview, I was fully convinced, that whatever difference there is between the negro and the European in the conformation of the nose and the colour of the skin, there is none in the genuine sympathies and characteristic feeling of our common nature. (N, p.93)

(Given this, it is unfortunate how well he appears to get on with the slave-owners, though he is unavoidably reliant on their help.)

In other, less obvious places Mitchell adds asides to show the limited perspectives on Africa of Park and others. "There was a great black civilisation before there was a great European" he points out in his introduction to the continent while Park is offstage (p.30). This is intended to be cautionary for most readers. Later, as Park passes through Woolli, Mitchell observes that in his journal there is no mention of the brilliance of native wood-sculpture there: "Probably these carvings seemed to him, as to many another, mere barbaric botchings in good wood" he adds, somewhat speculatively (p.59). A number of occasions find Park generalising "to an unwarranted extent, describing customs as general when they are particular to one phase of culture or tribe" (p.218).

Yet despite Park's relative ignorance and various other faults, his stuffy, humourless account may have advantages. As Mitchell notes, "His chronicles meticulously lack abuse" (p.97) and they consist of "flat, genteel writing" (p.259). Perhaps Park was simply without the capacity to abuse. He notes down the incursions of natives onto his boat, for instance, in this manner: "they are numerous [. . .] noisy, and very troublesome."[5] Hardly a friendly description, but at least a

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5 Mungo Park, Travels in the Interior of Africa, in The Travels of Mungo Park (London, 1954), p.3. Park's account first published 1816.

sober one. But Mitchell's yearning for the vivid momentarily transforms the Africans into animals in his corresponding account: "chattering and grinning . . . they swarmed on board" (N, p.39). Park soon discourses solemnly on Mandingo law, which rests on "appeal to ancient custom", although since Islam is making headway, it is introducing

> many of the civil institutions of the Prophet, and where the Koran is not found sufficiently explicit, recourse is had to a commentary called Al Sharra, containing, as I was told, a complete exposition or digest of the Mohammedan laws, both civil and criminal, properly arranged and illustrated. (Travels, p.13)

As every decent materialist such as Mitchell would know, this means that "[s]uperimposed upon the ancient Negro tribal customs we catch sight of a grotesque admixture of Mohammedan law and European ethic" (N, p.44). Where does the grotesqueness lie? Purely in the incongruity? In the Islamic quotient? In the tribal? Surely not in our own "ethic", superior to mere "law"? Mitchell's vague contempt here does not select a definite target. But then, it is hard to tell, as what Park is riding through consists of "the dark obscurities of treey Africa" (N, p.53). It is not clear whether this heart of darkness is merely physical due to the leaves' shadows, or emblematic of Africa's essence, or emblematic of the Africa apparent to, and created by, white explorers.

Mitchell's efforts at seriousness in dealing with Africa are interspersed with wisecracks. The continent has several funny customs, such as the village wife-beating session known as Mumbo Jumbo (recognised as amusing even by Park) but it also has funny names in abundance. Park communicates these impassively. He gets to the Walli-Woolli border, which evokes from Mitchell: "These borderlands of fantastic nursery nomenclature" (p.55); there is "a village with the improbable name of Dooggii" (p.69) and another "rejoicing in the equally improbable name of Buggil" (p.69). People are as funny as places: an elderly Mandingo bears "the flippant name of Tiggity Sego" (p.88) -- transferred epithet is presumably occurring here. Nor are

kings exempt: one "had the prepossessing name of Daisy Koorabari. Daisy, however, (which modern philologists would transliterate unhumorously as Desi) was a title" (p.103). A law of diminishing returns operates with our rip-roaring guffaws over African quaintness; Mitchell perhaps begins to perceive this in the book's final two-thirds, with the absence of anything further on these lines. The Star newspaper reviewer censured him for this in 1934;[6] Mitchell does not, however, entertain the possibility that anyone might be at a complete loss to understand the humour of words ending in the [i] syllable; it is enough that his particular readership will probably understand, those who are not stuffy and out-of-touch like Mungo. His writing is heavily reliant upon the reader's amusement at, and assumed distance from, the peculiarities of other races.

2 Incitement to Racial Hatred

> "Wrong? Their noses, their prophets, their God, their temple, their greed, their swinish lack of imagination, their treatment of the Greeks, their crucifying of Christ, their ghastly tabernacle, their fouling of every clean and sweet thing in the world. [. . .] Jews! History vomits on their name." (LT, p.184)

> Huebsch made no attempt to slip behind these apologetics of history. He was in every detail the Jew of caricature and controversy, with a large head, an ovoid head, whence outbranched a great, curving beak of a nose. So did his eyebrows curve and, his lips, which were thick and red. (LT, p.32)

> [. . .] naked and tall and golden brown, not one of them under six feet in height. Some of them were boys, no old men. And their faces! They were the faces of no savages of whom she had ever heard or read: broad, comely, high-cheekboned. (TGB, p.100)

All of Mitchell's overt references to Nazism are strongly condemnatory ones; none of his overt references to the Jews, outside of the utterances of his fictional

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[6] See Star review, 20 March 1934 in collection of articles re. Mitchell in NLS, MS 26107.

characters, show antisemitism unless one counts a routine disparaging of the culture and religion of the New Testament.[7] What the above quotations on ugly Jews in Lost Trumpet and gorgeous, golden, high-cheekboned proto-Nordics in Three Go Back represent is Mitchell as a stirrer of sensation and controversy over racial issues, sometimes perhaps without being fully aware of all the implications of what he is saying. The Golden men have their origins in the ideas of Grafton Elliot Smith; these are the Cro-Magnards, possible ancestors of the Norsemen. Mitchell therefore makes them tall, high-cheekboned supermen. If golden-brownness suggests some distance from ruddy-cheeked Saxondom, the continually-stressed word "golden" evokes blondness, even though this is not made explicit. They are capable, incidentally, of "running faster than the horses" (p.99). Edwin Morgan's introduction to Gay Hunter finds the book's scenes involving nudity to have "odd quasi-fascist resonances from the German cult of the nude body in the twenties and thirties, culminating in Leni Riefenstahl's famous film" (GH, p.vii) Given the rather unglamorous appearances of the hunters in this novel, though (e.g.p.67), he may have been thinking of Three Go Back. It would be easy with the tall, golden men to be guilty of over-determination; Nazism did not foist a cult of nudity and tall, perfect bodies onto the rest of the world. The relationship was symbiotic; it was heavily influenced by, as well as influential on, that cult. Thirties poems in praise of proletarian revolution often fetishise tallness, as Valentine Cunningham makes clear in his chapter "High Failure".[8] D.H. Lawrence, believing in a number of ideas involving a return to nature, already loves an elemental nudity in 1916 in Women in Love.[9] All this said, it is still unfortunate that Mitchell's thirties writing should worship tall, high-cheekboned "golden men" in a way not comparable to his treatment of any other race.

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[7] See ScSc, p.315.

[8] Cunningham,pp.158-61.

[9] Lawrence, Women in Love, pp.300-11.

Jews are never flattered in Mitchell's work. The quotations above, however, can be put into an explanatory context. The first one, on history vomiting over the Jews, is said by The Lost Trumpet's disturbed young novelist, Quaritch, who spends his time in the novel getting drunk and abusing mankind. Late on, it is revealed that his mental sickness derives from the death of a lover "murdered by the lust of a filthy Jew who stole her from me" (LT, p.45). Antisemitism is revealed here as stemming from a combination of arbitrariness and sexual jealousy. The second quotation above, on Jewish facial features, is prefaced by a moderating ethno-erudition:

> I have been told that the characteristic features with which we associate the modern Jew have no true Jewish associations at all: they are a later grafting from Mongoloid and Negroid converts. (LT, p.32)

The Jew Huebsch, then, *happens* to look like the Jew of caricature, but this has no real significance. He *happens* to be rich; this too is unimportant. The game being played is a slightly dangerous one: Mitchell invites racial prejudice and then rejects it ironically or playfully. One could defend him on the grounds that racial arguments are taking place in the early thirties anyway, whether he likes it or not, and thus the most positive reaction to all this is to enter the fray and contest the issues with everyone else. Simon Stukely Newman, the explorer in The Thirteenth Disciple, boasts his "good Amurrican blood". Malcom adds "He was of Jewish extraction, in spite of his meandering nose and sandy hair, but either he or his ancestors had ratted to the Nords" (TD, p.269). When Leon Ropstein, the conservative candidate in Stained Radiance, touts a strengthening of the racist Aliens Act (an anti-immigration measure passed in Parliament in 1905), we are informed that his father was a "German Jew who had hawked old china in Frankfurt" (SR, p.162). Whatever the reason, Mitchell does often seem willing to reveal secret Jewish identities. Ropstein's meetings in Stained Radiance are broken up "by an infamous disregard of etiquette" when the anarcho-communists (unlike the feeble Labour and Liberal parties) pose as racists. Their maverick organiser Andreas van Koupa organises this

chant against Ropstein when he abuses Aliens in his speeches:

> We don't want an Alien
> We don't want a Jew,
> We don't want a Sheeny
> And we don't want you! (p.166)

This is a typical Mitchell combination of devilry and social conscience; the reader is pushed towards approving of and being amused by a racist chant by young men best described as thugs because of its merciless exposure of the humbug politician at whom it is aimed.

The scene referred to above is presented very much as drama, without much overt narratorial intrusion. There are distinct advantages for Mitchell in eliding the narratorial voice when stirring race-feeling of one sort or another, as often happens in the Scottish work; he can thus absolve himself of responsibility for sentiments expressed. Speak of the Mearns, for instance, recounts some of the Howe's history. We come to the time of the Spanish Armada, as one ship tries to flee back home:

> The Santa Catarina, battered and torn; and maybe she'd have escaped to her home and her crew got back to their ordinary work of selling onions up and down the streets but that she came within smell of Stonehaven and sank like a stone with all hands complete. (pp.22-23)

Responsibility for any bigotry and simple-mindedness here may be laid at other doors than Mitchell's while the joke can be enjoyed at the same time. Chae Strachan's disparaging reference to Africans in Sunset Song ("awful constipated folk, the blacks" -- p.140) is presumably intended to operate in a similar way.

Mitchell, though, seems to be in sympathy with Metaxa and Malcom in The Thirteenth Disciple when they joke about black sensitivities. The word "unnecessarily" is an interesting choice in the following exchange: does it function as an apology or a statement of carelessness?

> In Paris Malcom saw his first American; Paris was flooded with Americans.

> "Negroes among them, too" he observed, unnecessarily.
> Metaxa, eyebrows a-tilt, remonstrated: "Coloured men, Malcom, coloured men. No nigger alive admits he's black; he is quite passionately coloured. Spectrum-worship . . . Fancy a white man speaking of himself as one of the bleached race! Still, we wouldn't like to be called blancers." (p.155)

Blacks elsewhere are not travestied in this way, but generally limited to subordinate positions as large, grinning lookers-on. This occurs in Spartacus with its grinning negroes who castrate Kleon (p.3), in "The Lost Prophetess" with the giant Negro guard (CC, p.59), in "The Life and Death of Elia Constantinides" with its mad black cook (CC, pp.148-50), in The Lost Trumpet with a passing "gigantic negro" (p.94) and in Image and Superscription with its "naked Negro, sinewy and black" chasing the hero's mother (p.214). Such examples derive, perhaps, from Mitchell's boyhood reading of Buchan's Prester John and various Rider Haggard novels.[10] This is primarily laziness and reliance on stereotypical models lying to hand; to indict Mitchell on such charges is to indict many.

There is a different, more personal tone in his treatment of the Welsh, a relatively safe and easy target for abuse, who appear at a consistent disadvantage in several places. The Thirteenth Disciple contains the hated sergeant Morgan,

> in charge of the hut, a Welshman, an old army soldier, a malingerer and snarling half-wit in the army tradition [who would terrorise him and shout] "Where iss that puggled bastard?" (p.119)

This suggests an event during Mitchell's own time in the army, and one possible origin of his anti-Welshness. There are others, though. Mitchell is probably writing from experience in the case of the Welsh miner caricatured in Stained Radiance, reflected in Communist James Storman's uncharitable, cynical consciousness as the latter attends a political rally:

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10 John Buchan, Prester John (London, 1910); Rider Haggard, King Solomon's Mines (London, 1885).

> Dark, Welsh, excitable, miners crowded the hall. The strains of coal-dust still lingered where the hair encroached on forehead and neck. Finger-nails showed their black serrations against clenched fists [. . .]. They were men brawny, eager, cowed and devout. Their eyes showed red rims and their teeth, yellow and unhealthy, gleamed in the revealment of loud guffaws. (p.238)

The meeting opens with a hymn in Welsh. Storman speaks first, attracting lukewarm applause. Then the secretary of the local Minority movement speaks:

> He smelt of the pit. His accent was the volpaning whine of his country. He recounted an obscene jest in which the local coalowner was the butt. He spoke of Jesus, Buddha, St David, Spartacus and Karl Marx as early Communists.

The meeting becomes more enthusiastic. The speaker, emotionally over-wrought, winds up to an orgiastic, apocalyptic peroration:

> "And, py God, when we fight next time, we fight to a finish. There'll pe no Paldwin, no landlords, no ploody coalowners left. And we'll take what's ours, what we've made, what we've been ropped of through the centuries, and use it up for ourselves alone. [. . .] We'll organise a decent state, where in time there shall pe no more weeping, neither shall there pe any tears, as the first Communist, Jesus of Nazareth, prophesied [. . .]." The meeting cheered, leapt to hob-nailed boot-soles, swung in a hysteric ecstasy of fine Welsh voices, into the chorus of the Internationale.
>
> Across the swelling wave of song, from the rear of the hall to the platform, the eyes of the only two men left unstirred [Storman and an on-duty policeman] met in ironic amusement. (pp. 240-41)

The Welsh, then remain mortgaged hopelessly to a combination of emotionalism and chapel rhetoric, unsuitable for serious contemporary revolutionary purposes. The accents of the Celtic fringe do not help either. At one meeting of the Anarcho-Communist party,

> Disagreeing, delegates cursed each other in many dialects. Scotsmen and Welshmen, using uncouth expressions, were listened to by fellow-delegates with a shamed, amused contempt.

(p.100)

The narrator does not side entirely with such listeners; their own behaviour in general is ribald and barbarian, and includes whistling a woman delegate to embarrassed silence. Mitchell's own voice, of course, would not have been derided, with its Southern English accent (as we already know from Jean Baxter) and furthermore being clipped and precise according to his foster-daughter Mrs Catherine Nutt.[11]

In the case of the Welsh, once a miner, always a miner. In Three Go Back, the heroine contemplates the possible deaths of her descendants from her Golden Age lover. Perhaps they died on the wire in France, or on the streets in London, or were "drowned in some awful Welsh mine" (p.157). The Welsh do one other thing, and that is to sing, and to stage events comparable only with Scottish excesses. Arabs, in the story "Siva Plays the Game" "seemed generally as uproarious as Welshmen at an Eisteddfod or Scotsmen at a haggis-orgy -- and quite as unintelligible." (Scots Hairst, p.191)[12] This betokens, perhaps, a kind of fondness. Unintelligible language, however, can become a disturbingly foul thing as perceived by Mitchell in the diatribe against the Irish. His friend George Malcolm Thomson, to whom Cloud Howe is dedicated, writes in Caledonia, or, The Future of the Scots (published in the same series as Hanno) that the fertile immigrant Irish are taking over Scotland.[13] Mitchell appears not to care about this, but rather about the mess the Irish have got into at home:

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[11] From my own conversations with Mrs Nutt at her home in Essex, December 1991.

[12] Munro's Hairst uses the version Mitchell wrote in 1924 that was published in T.P.'s and Cassell's Weekly, October 18 1924, pp.849-50. The unintelligible Welsh, alongside other provocative remarks about Arabs' faces being flattened by shovels and covered in sores, are excised from the 1932 version in PDEN, p.264-65.

[13] George Malcolm Thomson, Caledonia, or, The Future of The Scots, p.10.

> Since [the South Irish of the middle class] obtained their Free State the belch of their pride has given the unfortunate Irish Channel the seeming of a cess-pool. Having blamed their misfortunes on England for centuries, they achieved independence and promptly found themselves incapable of securing that independence by the obvious and necessary operation -- social revolution. Instead: revival of Gaelic, bewildering an unhappy world with uncouth spellings and titles and postage-stamps: revival of the blood feud; revival of the decayed literary cultus which (like most products of the Kelt) was an abomination even while actually alive but poor manure when it died . . . . (ScSc p.145)

Granted that his contributions to Scottish Scene were meant to offend, Mitchell's distance from English jingoistic stereotyping is not immediately obvious. The anti-Keltic comments here are given more extended expression in his attack on the Kelts in "The Antique Scene":

> A strain quite alien to the indubitable and original Scot, they were, and remain, one of the greatest curses of the Scottish scene, quick, avaricious, unintelligent, quarrelsome, cultureless and uncivilizable. It is one of the strangest jests of history that they should have given their name to so much that is fine and noble, the singing of poets and the fighting of great fights, in which their own part has been that of gaping, unintelligent audition or mere carrionbird raiding. (ScSc, pp.22-23)

A page before, we have been treated to a picture of mellow, home-making Picts of the "Archaic Civilization", who live in "village communities", perform peaceful crofting, and are yet to experience "organised warfare". The Kelts are to invade and change all this. Mitchell's picture of these good Picts being overborne by a totally other band of hooligan Kelts is, unsurprisingly, not borne out by fact. In reaction against a cult of Kelticism (existing in some forms to this day).[14] Mitchell accepts the cult's category of a basically unitary Keltic culture, set up in modern times by Arnold and Renan.[15] The controversial anthropologist Malcolm Chapman suggests

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[14] For a caustic interpretation of Keltic/ Gaelic revivalism, see Malcolm Chapman, The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture (Guildford, 1978).

[15] Chapman, The Gaelic Vision, p.81 and following.

that the terms Kelt/ Celt covers a variety of peoples and cultures, deriving from generalised Greek references to "foreigners" or, to translate more freely, "wogs", although this has been criticised as simplistic.[16] According to Alfred Smyth, the Picts were actually a Keltic people; other than this, agnosticism as to precise anthropological details on the Picts (where Mitchell is sure of himself) marks Michael Lynch's history of Scotland and F.T. Wainwright's The Problem of the Picts. Both, though, say that the Picts had warlords; Stuart Piggott suggests that settling and "the crofting pattern" is "characteristically that of the Celts".[17]

It is a shame that Mitchell's neat duality (Pict = peaceful crofter; Kelt = savage barbarian) has to been utterly exploded by more detailed historical research than his own; unfortunate historical judgement, though, is conspicuous in other large pronouncements of his. The anti-Kelt attack is highly relevant to Mitchell's views on "small nations" in general. When the Irish come in for particular criticism in "Glasgow", they belong to a kind Mitchell knows too well:

> What a curse to the earth are small nations! [. . .] Groupings of babbling little morons -- babbling militant on the subjects (unendingly) of their *exclusive* cultures, their *exclusive* languages, their *national* souls, their *national* genius [. . .]. Mangy little curs a-yap above their minute hoardings of shrivelled bones, they cease from their yelpings at passers-by only in such intervals as they devote to civil war flea-hunts. Of all the accursed progeny of World War, surely the worst was this dwarf mongrel-litter. (ScSc, pp.144-45)

Mitchell is not without influential allies here. He seems to be following quite

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16 See Chapman, The Kelts: The Construction of a Myth (London, 1992), p.32. Colin Kidd's Times Literary Supplement review (16 July 1993, p.13) applauds the spirit of Chapman's argument, agreeing that "there is no such thing as a timeless Celtic identity" but attacks its letter, arguing that there are more cultural links between different Celtic groups than Chapman would have us believe.

17 See Alfred P. Smyth, Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80-1000 (Edinburgh, 1989), pp.52-53; Michael Lynch, pp.15,19; F. T. Wainwright (ed.), The Problem of the Picts (Perth, 1980), pp.9-14,39; Stuart Piggott, Scotland Before History (Edinburgh, 1982), p.90.

closely the sentiments of Friedrich Engels, who wrote the following on Mitchell's hate-targets-to-be in 1848:

> These relics of a nation mercilessly trampled under foot in the course of history, as Hegel says, these residual fragments of peoples always become fanatical standard-bearers of counter-revolution, and remain so until their complete extermination or loss of their national character: just as their whole existence in general is itself a protest against a great historical revolution [. . .].
> The next world war will result in the disappearance from the face of the earth not only of reactionary classes and dynasties, but of entire reactionary peoples. And that, too, is a step forward.[18]

Leaving questions of morality aside, Engels shows a rage that is theoretically out of place. The Austrian Slavs against whom this was directed, such as Croatians, Dalmatians and Slavonians, showed "counter-revolutionary" behaviour that dismayed self-styled progressives who assumed that revolution in Vienna could tidy up and control the rest of the Austrian Empire, with everyone else falling into line. Roman Rosdolsky explains that

> [b]y non-historic peoples, Engels understood those peoples who were unable to achieve a strong state of their own in the past and therefore lacked [. . .] the power to achieve national independence in the future.[19]

Tom Nairn suggests that "the basic concept" of the non-historic is "stronger than its polemical misuse"; some peoples have not formed separate states, and thus have no history as separate nations.[20] But polemical misuse, like it or not, has often been the norm.

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[18] Friedrich Engels, Neue Rheinische Zeitung, January 13 1849; in Marx and Engels, Collected Works (London, 1976), vol. 8, pp.230,238.

[19] Roman Rosdolsky, Engels and the Non-Historic Peoples: The National Question of 1848 (Glasgow, 1986), p.5.

[20] Nairn, p.206.

As Rosdolsky points out, Engels makes no mention of the fact that the Hungarian and Polish nobility claimed territory lived in by Austrian Slavs as their "national heritage", understandably alienating them and making them unlikely to align themselves with such a nobility's general political programme.[21] Engels, in a knee-jerk reaction to what he saw as intransigence, simply appeals to Hegel's dubious concept of "historic peoples" in order to frame the polemic above. What Mitchell writes in Scottish Scene is a recapitulation of a Marxist polemic that has not applied Marxist analysis to itself; for the Austrian Slavs part of the issue was class disagreement with the nobility. For the nations Mitchell mentions the issues there as well are bound to involve complex sociologies as well as simply blind nationalist feeling. When one comes to the fiction set in the Middle East, however, Mitchell's interest in nations and their positions within "history" involves less polemic and more subtlety.

3 Orientalism and the Eastern Fiction

Mitchell's first published work, "Siva Plays the Game" won a short story competition in 1924, as Ian Munro recounts in SH. It is a tale of contradictory experiences of Eastern culture, as George de Selincourt, the author of innumerable cheap novelettes set among the Arabs, visits the Sivan oasis in the Sahara to obtain good copy, but learns to adjust at least some of his vision of Eastern reality. His romanticism, though, is kept alive and kicking by a successful plot by a young woman, Zoe, to embroil him in a fictional escape from danger and then marry him. The initial disillusionment, though, is of a particular kind:

> If you get the mentality of the man, he felt actually insulted. For Arabs were neither hawk-nosed nor handsome; as a rule their faces appeared to have been flattened with shovels, and their bodies were covered with festering sores. Moreover, they were neither grave nor

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21 Rosdolsky, p.99.

> fanatical; on the contrary they seemed generally as uproarious as Welshmen at an Eisteddfod or Scotsmen at a haggis-orgy -- and quite as unintelligible. His guide Selim read Haeckel and spoke disparagingly of the Prophet's knowledge of biology. And no wonderful maidens sang at eve beside the pillars of a civilisation buried in the sand . . . (SH, p.191)

The Haeckel touch is an arresting one. As for the bulk of the rest of this description, it seems in danger of junking one version of the shimmering, gorgeous East, only to replace it with another: the East as rubbish tip (although the above paragraph is muted in Persian Dawns, Egyptian Nights as mentioned in the earlier note). This has a distinct parallel in a recent work of literary criticism: B.J. Moore-Gilbert's Kipling and "Orientalism". The thesis of this book is that Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) is too glib in its conflation of "metropolitan" and "Anglo-Indian" perspectives on the East, and that authors like Kipling should be given their due for subtlety and authenticity of representation, instead of being constantly complained about for adding to the mass of distorted Western material on the subject.[22] "Metropolitan" Orientalism consists of the know-nothing Dickensian vision of a gorgeous East simply asking to be appropriated and expropriated, as evident with Dombey and Son, with its

> rich East India House, teeming with suggestions of precious stuffs and stones, tigers, elephants, howdahs, hookahs, umbrellas, palm trees, palanquins, and gorgeous princes of a brown complexion sitting on carpets.[23]

Knowing Anglo-Indians, by contrast, write of the disillusionment experienced on reaching India and living there; indeed, of the "purgatorial nature of Indian life".[24] Moore-Gilbert then industriously piles up examples, not least a plethora of suicides

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[22] B.J. Moore-Gilbert, Kipling and "Orientalism" (Beckenham, 1986), p.25.

[23] Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son, (Harmondsworth, 1988), p.87. First published 1847-48.

[24] Moore-Gilbert, p.39.

and breakdowns to bear out his point.[25] Despite this remarkable display of energy, all this proves is that, once again, as Said would suggest, Western discourse has entrenched a certain view of the East, formulated by Westerners, without regard for Eastern self-definition.

Mitchell's story, however, involves more than an account of disillusionment. In her bid to trick George into marrying him, Zoe consults a novel in order to create a sense of drama as she writes a letter: "Oh my hero save me save me she cried" (SH p.194). George falls for the ruse, marries her, and goes back to England unsuspecting. Zoe has lied, but "Siva was playing the game". The East, in the form of Zoe, actually takes on the configurations imagined by the West and demanded of it. Mitchell has made use of an infinitely applicable model.

3.1 Narrative, History, Politics

Moore-Gilbert also charges Said with not defining his terms. Some way through Orientalism, Said strikes a note of hope: that in Western discourses concerning the East, whenever *narrative* is in evidence, "diachrony" is introduced into the system, which threatens the notions of "unchanging eternality" associated with the East:

> Narrative is the specific form taken by written history to counter the permanence of vision. Narrative asserts the power of men to be born, develop, and die, the tendency of institutions and actualities to change, the likelihood that modernity and contemporaneity will finally overtake "classical" civilisations; above all, it asserts that the domination of reality by vision is no more than a will to power, a will to truth and interpretation, and not an objective condition of history. Narrative, in short, introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision; it violates the serene Apollonian fictions asserted by vision.[26]

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[25] Moore-Gilbert, pp.140-44.

[26] Edward Said, Orientalism (Harmondsworth, 1978), p.240.

What is this "narrative", asks Moore-Gilbert; any story? Many narratives can reinforce stereotypes. With a view to defending Said, one might claim that it is defined by its immediate context. Said talks on the same page about the Orient being "made to enter history" with the onset of the First World War. Said's sense of narrative here must involve one that is in some way tied into history, that is more than just the creation of an Eastern tableau, that gives a reader more than just flat "vision". Mitchell's stories set in the East are mixtures of narrative and non-narrative in this sense.

They are told from a degree of experience. Mitchell travelled widely in the Middle East between 1919 and 1923, when he was serving in the British Army. On the other hand, being a member of an occupying force necessarily has to limit what one sees of the inner life of a foreign culture. His short stories were originally published individually in The Cornhill and Macmillan's Magazine before being collected into Calends of Cairo and Persian Dawns, Egyptian Nights.[27] Not one is of the standard of his five Scottish stories, due to uncertainties of style, clanging surprise endings, and, for want of a better phrase, lack of felt life. Nevertheless, taking all the Cairo stories together, the sum consists of more than the parts; some kind of picture of Cairo has been constructed, as Kipling's Plain Tales From the Hills constructs a cumulative view of Anglo-Indian life, although the latter's is more dextrous.[28]

Two tales that stand out as historically aware depict armed opposition to the Cairene authorities. In "Revolt" in Persian Dawns, Egyptian Nights, we glimpse the feelings of both native and European communities on the eve of a spectacular rising. The latter are not universally aware of what is at hand: "European Cairo thronged her streets, cried her wares, wore her gayest frocks, set forth on evening excursions to Saqqan and the Sphinx" (p.183). Some, however, know that they are "on the edge of a volcano" as the native population becomes ever more restive (p.184). The

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[27] See Malcolm, pp.200-01 for full list of stories and original publication.

[28] Rudyard Kipling, Plain Tales From The Hills (London, 1890).

story's hero, Donia ibn Saud, is of mixed race, and known formerly as Thomas O'Donnell to some of the whites whose paths he crossed in unfortunate circumstances some years ago. He was accused by them of attempted rape of a white woman, although the narrator's implication (putting the phrase "had it been a white man, of course . . ." into a chauvinist character's mouth, p.186) is that O'Donnell's colour caused a mild sexual advance of some kind to be perceived as a savage sexual assault. Having given up his former identity, he is now known only as ibn Saud to his insurrectionary followers. He voices dedication to his cause in apparent disregard for individual lives:

> And what of the folk -- our brothers, our sisters -- who die out there in their hovels and hunger? Thousands every year. What matters your miserable life -- Hassan's -- mine -- if we can show the sun to those who rot their lives away in the kennels of the Warrens? (p.183)

Shortly afterwards, however, he saves a small white girl from the attacks of native children. She happens to be the daughter of the woman he made advances to. Though he has in theory committed himself to the killing of all whites, his compassion for an individual child causes him to preach peace and tolerance before the Egyptian crowd which gathers to hear him but then kills him as a traitor. The rising, making too much noise too early, is crushed by the police, and European Cairo remains safe. There is no moral on the lines of the desirability of being nice to children anyway, or not letting sentiment obstruct revolution. The story is more an exploration of irresolvable conflicts between humanism and ideological purity, bearing a distant relationship to Ewan's predicaments in Grey Granite.

Emphasis is placed on the power and sheer numbers of the people in revolt; this, however, cuts two ways, suggesting unanimity against British oppression, but involving overemphasis on the homogeneous mob. Even O'Donnell sees "a horde of native children" (p.189). The "massing insurrectionists" themselves are in a "frenzy"; the Cairene Labour Union "massed its scores of rail and tramway workers"

(p.193); one particular leader, Es Saif, has "the gift of welding a mob into a Jihad" (p.193). O'Donnell sees "wave upon wave, a sea of faces before him" (p.195) which is also "the mist" which "quivered" (p.196). O'Donnell's/ ibn Saud's efforts to placate it fail completely:

> Ibn Saud shook him off. Crowned in his purpose, infinitely humble, he outreached both his arms to the mob . . . . With a roar as of the sea, the hordes rose in a wave and poured upon the platform. (p.198)

These images would no doubt readily occur to a soldier in the British army, the mob being something homogeneous and not particularly human, despite any attempts made to comprehend their situation. Edward Said quotes George Orwell on colonialism's dependency on such impressions:

> When you walk through a town like this -- two hundred thousand inhabitants, of whom at least twenty thousand own literally nothing, it is always difficult to believe you are walking among human beings. All colonial empires are founded on that fact. The people have brown faces -- besides, they have so many of them! Are they really the same flesh as yourself? Do they even have names? Or are they merely a handful of undifferentiated brown stuff, about as individual as bees or coral insects? [29]

Later, making the point more specific and contemporary, Said adds: "In newsreels or newsphotos, the Arab is always shown in large numbers."[30] On the other hand, had Mitchell guessed his way into depicting more native individuality he might have patronised, and misrepresented on a more spectacular scale. He runs something of this risk in a depiction of exploited Greeks in Cairo in Persian Dawns, Egyptian Nights's "Dienekes' Dream".

This story follows the progress of weavers in Sparta who leave their homeland due to impending financial ruin. In Cairo they find nowhere at all to settle and work,

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[29] Said, pp.251-52.

[30] Said, p.287.

until their attention turns to a derelict site used as a rubbish dump. They move in, and begin to suffer and die from disease until a mammoth removal project, carried out entirely by themselves, rids the place of all the infectious garbage and sewage. Despite the horror of this, the land's ironic name "Little Perfume" sticks. They begin to enjoy life and prosper, but more problems are on the way in the nineteen-twenties:

> Cairo, indeed, was advancing in Westernisation in great strides. Site-prices had doubled and trebled since the War. New buildings were springing up in every ward in the ancient city of the Mamelukes. Nor were effects unforeseen and numerous enough slow to erupt from all that causal activity. Title-deeds and land-rights were everywhere being questioned and overhauled. (p.240)

A "landlord" emerges with technical rights to Little Perfume, "a rentier, a Parisian Egyptian of the new generation, suave, sleek, and bored" (p.241). He wishes to evict without paying them anything; they are desperate to stay put until a bill is passed in the Egyptian Chamber of Deputies "enforcing value-compensation for improved sites". If this goes through, the landlord will be unlikely to pay the amount involved, and so will leave them be (p.243). The local Egyptians are on the squatters' side, but the police are not. A siege ensues, complete with gun-battles; Mitchell unblushingly links this to the battle of Thermopylae at the story's beginning and end. The Greeks are driven out, after the majority of their young men have been killed, just as the vital bill gets to the committee stage too late.

This story would no doubt please Said. There is ethnic complexity, and a sense of Western history, economic and legal, interacting with that of the East, specifically in Cairo. The effort for positive images of the oppressed perhaps oversteps its mark, as there are pronounced tendencies towards socialist realism. William Malcolm points out that Mitchell's description of the Greeks' efforts to remove the mound of waste from their allotment "could have been penned by Gladkov or Gorky".[31] He justifies

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[31] Malcolm, book, p.59.

this with the following quotation:

> They did it. It turned in the telling of later years into an epic of struggle, a thing of heroism and great feats, intermingled with shouted laughter. The fatigue and horror and weariness the years came to cover with the tapestry of legend: how Londos, stripped to a breach-clout, dug and excavated and filled every one of the sacks and baskets for four days on end, the while the others bore them on the two-mile journey -- Londos, gigantic, unsleeping, pausing now and then to drink the coffee brought to him, and vomit up that coffee at the next nest of dreadful stenches [. . .]. (p.230)

Mitchell is in danger here of forcing them into unwieldy stereotypes, although with the unimpeachable intention of valuing ordinary people, whatever their race.

The logic of Marxism would, incidentally, run in favour of the British presence in Cairo and its economic consequences that visit themselves on the Greek weavers. Marx himself is on record to the effect that imperialism is a good thing, in that European exploitation of the rest of the world will globally transplant the Capitalist Mode of Production; urban proletariats will then be created, which will then rise up and overthrow Capitalism. The greater the imperialist exploitation, the faster the people's revolution. "History" is used as a totem in the way Engels uses it in his small nations polemic quoted above. In "The Movements of 1847" Marx writes:

> In America we have witnessed the conquest of Mexico and have rejoiced at it. It is also an advance [. . .] when such a country is forcibly drawn into the historical process.[32]

And in "The British Rule in India", he writes:

> England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in India, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But [. . .] the question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a revolution in the social state of India? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution.[33]

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[32] Marx and Engels, Collected Works, vol.6, p.527.

[33] Marx and Engels, Collected Works, vol.12, p.132.

Mitchell's views on this are not recorded; "Revolt" and "Dienekes' Dream" bring such an analysis to mind. Not all Egyptian revolts will succeed, but imperialist capitalism cannot last in Cairo for ever. An unpublished manuscript of Mitchell's, though, set in Cairo, provides interesting implicit commentary on the relationships between imperialism and revolution.

The story centres on an English novelist named Roger Mantell, who lives on Cairo's outskirts with his wife Rhea. He is also an agent of the Comintern, and is engaged in negotiations with the All-Egyptian Labour Union to bring them in:

> Roger summed up the conditions of entry into the Communist fold. Egypt would appoint two delegates to represent her on the International; more could not be sanctioned, the A.E.L.U. having applied for admission as a "sympathising" party only. These two delegates would participate in the yearly Moscow Congress. All *major* decisions of the Congresses would be considered as binding on the A.E.L.U. as though it were an actual Communist party. [34]

The Union representatives become restive; how can decisions be binding for them if they are not fully affiliated? Joining is impossible on such terms. In response, Roger employs a shameless and pragmatic lyricism. If the melodrama is, like much of Mitchell's, somewhat excessive, there is an apposite and mimetic quality to such excess:

> He reached into their hearts and plucked from them remembrances of horror and pity, of the starving, the unfed, the brutalised, the lowly. Races and nations were the barriers of the master-folks, the oppressors, erected by them to blind and delude the world's workers. Only by organisation within one army -- the Army of the International -- could they ever win to freedom, to power [. . .].
>
> He played upon their desires, their hates, their loves and their vanities as might a lute-player. Eyes glistened about the table: brown men sat up straightly. Hearing that golden

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[34] Mitchell, unpublished novel set in Egypt, in NLS MS 26057, f.111. For more pages, see reverse sides of MS 26052.

> voice, they felt pitiful, exalted, controllers of destiny. For subtly he made them aware that if the A.E.L.U. remained outside the International, long and desperate would be the battle waged in other lands. Europe looked to Egypt that night, cried to her, stretched hands to her, asked of her that she might relinquish a little of her freedom of action for the sake of that glorious mutual Dawn they would inaugurate . . .
>
> It was a speech of consummate artistry. Of all the stirred roomful, only one man other than Roger guessed its devilish falseness. An eager, sobbing whisper of applause swept on Roger as he sat down. These men's hearts were his forever.[35]

They vote to join on Roger's terms; he then proceeds to control, manipulate, and break them for reasons partly to do with personal whim. An attempted uprising in the poorest part of Cairo, out of phase with the A.E.L.U., ends in chaos and a police clampdown. Roger escapes, leaving the Egyptian Left in turmoil. White superiority has been thoroughly inscribed into proletarian politics, with largely negative results. Social history also forms part of the Mitchell Cairo oeuvre. "The Lost Prophetess" in Calends of Cairo traces one Jane Hatoun's feminist career. Prefacing this in the twenties, the narrator Saloney stares at a demonstration: "look -- God mine, here in Cairo! -- a women's contingent." He reflects that it would have been unthinkable twenty years ago, when Miss Hatoun came to town. Of mixed parentage, and brought up in England in an atmosphere of pre-Raphaelitism and advanced ideas, she goes out as a "missionary" with a "gospel" of women's emancipation (p.56). This provokes the locals, one of whose number kidnaps her. He is unprepossessing:

> He was the strange hybrid, an Egyptian-Japanese. His mother, of one of the few Muslim families in Japan, had been brought to Egypt in 1840 to implement some primitive Pan-Islamic plotting of Holy War.
>
> Old and with the shrivelled face and beast eyes, a man like a hyena, he lived in the barrack-place of Sharikhan, upon the Nile [. . .].
>
> He at length returned with his new bride to those rooms in Sharikhan that had known so many women, where I think the very air was choked with the murdered soul-stuff of women. (p.57)

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35 Mitchell, unpublished novel, p.115.

Fortunately for Jane, after some routine eastern abuse at his hands he travels elsewhere, leaving her in the harem. It is there that she goes into trance-like ecstasy and proclaims a gospel with a mystical slant to it (e.g. "wild prophecies and miracles" (p.64)) but with practical consequences as well, seeing the woman "not as the mother or lover of men but as that dispossessed half of humanity which has never asserted the individual existence" (p.63). Despite a chance for escape arising, Jane elects to stay with the sisterhood she has created, accepting Arab identity of a kind, as *khatun* (prophetess) of *El Darb* (the road to enlightenment). When her kidnapper returns, she stabs him to death and then is murdered in her turn. Jane has, though, bequeathed the beginnings of feminism to her survivors.

The East, then, learns feminism from the West here. This is based on actual events. In Turkey in the 1920s, Kemal Ataturk revolutionised laws concerning women in a Westernisation programme, and the historian Naila Minai recounts both Turkish and Egyptian women taking inspiration from Western feminist models.[36] With that said concerning the positive side to Western roles in feminism, it is unfortunate that much of our literature has juxtaposed the apparent otherness of the East to the apparent otherness of women. Mitchell has some complicity in this, yet is at the same time aware of the problem.

3.2 The East as Woman; The East as Perverse

Edward Said is not entirely against such writers as Flaubert, Nerval, Conrad and Gide for looking for certain sexual qualities in the East. Nineteenth-century Europe, he argues, had institutionalised sex to an unhealthy degree, making it in some ways the province of bourgeois rules and regulations:

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36 Naila Minai, Women in Islam: Tradition and Transition in the Middle East (London, 1981), pp.46-70.

> What [Flaubert et. al.] looked for, then -- correctly, I think -- was a different type of sexuality, perhaps more libertine and less guilt-ridden; but even that quest, if repeated by enough people, could (and did) become as regulated and uniform as learning itself. In time "Oriental Sex" was as standard a commodity as any other in the mass culture, with the result that readers and writers could have it if they wished without necessarily going to the Orient.[37]

Mitchell's Cairo is definitely seductive. Despite its social problems and squalor, it has that discreet charm described in "Dienekes' Dream"; we are called to imagine and inhabit "those fervid Cairene mornings when the air is unthinkably pure and the day for an hour has the hesitating loveliness of a lovely woman" (PDEN, p.223). This, however, is a mere aside. In "The Epic", the theme is given more prolonged treatment. Colonel Saloney becomes acquainted with a peculiar Irishman named John Connan, who receives an enthralling poetic vision of a panorama of Cairo life and legend. He commits this to paper. His view of what Cairo is all about is classical, lush Orientalism:

> Could the Khalig or Cairo be anything else but a woman? Oh, she'll look a princess and a dream, fair and wild and dark and splendid, robed and crowned, with jewelled feet and jewelled hands. Age-old and very young, evil and dear and desirable, she'll go by [. . .] with the pride of all her days and all her blood and all the colours of Moqattam. (CC, p.96)

Saloney receives a taste of Connan's work, and rhapsodises over it, although, as with Tolkien's descriptions in The Lord of the Rings of the best songs the elves have to offer, we never get to hear any of it ourselves.[38] It is, however,

> the Epic of Cairo's soul -- of her who was life and more than life, Purpose and Desire and Achievement. Out of the dreams and changing fantasies she came, veiled and singing,

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37 Said, p.190.

38 See Nick Otty's caustic comments on this in "The Structuralist's Guide to Middle-Earth" in Robert Giddings (ed.), J.R.R. Tolkien: This Far Land (London, 1983), pp.154-78 (174).

> lovely and alien, she who was love divine itself -- and yet had known no lover [. . .]. (p.103)

This reference to Connan's dream-woman raises at least one problem: she is "veiled" and "alien", and yet the essence of Cairo. She must be alien to non-Egyptians, foreigners, then. Yet how do their projections of Cairene essence relate to Cairene self-definition? The East is pronounced as radically other as if objective judgement can be made on this score, when in fact the otherness is simply a product of Western unfamiliarity.

Connan's lust for this chimera extrapolates itself. During the night, he meets his alien dream-lover: "She stood not three feet way from me, her arms outstretched -- the spirit of the Khalig, the Woman I had created!" (p.106). Saloney suspects that Connan is not fully sane; this is borne out when he is heard to rave in apparent solitude before shooting himself through the heart. In what looks like a crude Mitchell attempt at a *coup de theatre* ending, the Sudanese slave at Connan's lodging is found shot at the same time. The story comes in essence from Robert Louis Stevenson's "Tale of Tod Lapraik" in which Tod, after having dabbled with the supernatural, is found with a bullet in his heart after an unidentified fiendish apparition has been shot.[39] Mitchell, though, has moulded the story to different purposes. It may be simply that Connan imagined the slave to be his Khalig-personification when she walked up to him one night, and he later shot her in a rage against his fantasies; it may equally be the case that she did actually merge with the dream woman and *become* the Khalig, as other Mitchell women, such as Chris, are apt to become more than themselves, except that in this case there is more of an aura of magic. The situation is left provocatively ambiguous, pointing towards Mitchell's desire on the one hand to explore the chimerical nature of poetic images of the Khalig, yet on the other, to use such images for all they are worth, in the first

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39 Robert Louis Stevenson, "Black Andie's Tale of Tod Lapraik" in Catriona (London, 1894), pp.162-76.

instance to a magazine audience looking for cheap thrills.

The East is a woman, and is therefore permeated with sexuality. Cairo's "The Children of Ceres" and "For Ten's Sake" are more suggestive of evil lewdness than, say, Stained Radiance's slices of a London prostitute's life. For Ten's Sake presents us with an evil city awaiting judgement, with a particularly evil street:

> The entrance of the vile Street of Ten, a loathsome resort of thieves and murderers, where were practised unnameable vices of which even Mevr talked under breath, where no gendarme had ever dared patrol, where of a morning the knifed and rifled bodies of the night's victims were flung out in the reeking gutters of sunrise. (CC p.17)

Though it is later to turn out that a number of dwellers in this vicinity are, or can be, good at heart, the townspeople are saved from doom not so much by their own virtues as by divine mercy infiltrating the heart of the scientist Richard Southcote, who warns them of an imminent earthquake in time for mass escape. The human reconciliation of the ending still leaves us with the "unnameable vices" of the story's beginning. Are such vices peculiar to the city of Mevr; would they not take place in London or Aberdeen as well? In "The Lost Prophetess" likewise, the sexual foibles (whatever they are) take on the trappings of specifically Eastern perversion. After Jane Hatoun has been kidnapped, she is taken off to be ravished:

> He who smiled at her the tigerish smile from withered, evil face the while her face and hands and feet were untied, who smiled while she stood blanched and horrified, who smiled even while her screams were echoing down those corridors of night. (CC p.59)

If she does not notice the "giant Negro", we do. She stands "blanched" and screams down the "corridors of night"; a literally white woman, therefore, is being abused against a black background. Her tormentor fills in with a conventional melodramatic pose, but what is foregrounded is the atmosphere, heavily tinged with white fear of foreign sexuality.

There is one good male in the story, Ragheb Pasha, who tries to help Jane, being

diametrically opposed to the jihad-mongers: "Enemy of the faith the mullahs have called him, him who has fought to destroy the creed of his fathers, with all its tenets of black bestiality and sex-enslavement" (CC p.65). Granted that certain versions of Islam can mean sex-enslavement, "tenets of black bestiality" is over-suggestive. "Black" can obviously be "very bad" and/ or "non-white"; "bestiality" can be "unsavoury practices" and/ or "sex involving animals". What with the blackness already highlighted in the story, these "tenets" tend to the more prejudicial interpretations.

The Lost Trumpet is even less coy, spelling out its racial-sexual conclusions in the episode where the narrator Saloney reveals to Princess Pelagueya, his lover-to-be, the worst aspects of his city:

> Cairo -- real Cairo without the colour and the drapings. This she had demanded and this I had given her! Cairo in horror and Cairo in loneliness; [. . .] places no tourist had ever penetrated [. . .].
> I took her down the Bab el Zuweiya into that wilderness of abandoned Khans where strange trades, ancient and evil as the East itself, are still plied [. . .]. We had passed through shaded doors into one of those lamplit theaters; we had sat side by side watching the Gomorrhan horrors enacted in the sweating silence, with the light so low that others also present -- we seemed the only white people there -- were dim and faceless [. . .].
> Perhaps she was the only white woman that had ever seen that vileness. (LT, pp.125,126,127)

This is, of course, Colonel Saloney talking rather than Mitchell. Saloney, however, has been our tour guide for the duration of Calends of Cairo, and in The Lost Trumpet he continues to function as guide to the city. If there is narratorial irony present in the Evil East passage, it is simply too subtle. The passage describes an animal being led away a little later. As a whole, it does not exactly state that bestiality and certain other forms of perversion are entirely foreign to Europe; it is more an insubstantial innuendo. It may be merely that, again, the East's forms of perversion seem more strange and disorienting than Western varieties.

3.3 Mystery and The Insubstantial

The East is strange not only in its sexual vices, but in its whole essence, despite Mitchell's early dalliance with the corrective rationalism of "Siva Plays the Game". As we have seen in "The Epic", John Connan projects the Khalig's character as alien, mysterious and veiled. In stories such as "He Who Seeks" and "The Passage of the Dawn" (respectively first and last in Calends of Cairo) we are given a sense of being on the edge of some profound truth of which we cannot quite get hold; that is what the East is somehow about. In the former tale, a White Russian named Andrei searches the Mediterranean for his elusive lover and finally catches up with her in Cairo, only to realise that he has experienced a vision rather than an actual encounter. The latter involves an explorer, John Gault, searching for a mystical gateway to enlightenment referred to as *The Passage of the Dawn* in a remote part of Egypt, being killed by bandits on the way, yet inspiring his friend and narrator Saloney to indulge in paper-thin speculation that "Somewhere, between the mountain-walls, there is wonder and the morning".[40] The plot of The Lost Trumpet concerns a search for the magic trumpet which shattered the walls of Jericho in Joshua's time; a 1932 version of Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade.[41] The trumpet is finally found and blown, and causes all present except the blower, who keels over and dies, to be imbued with a divine sense of well-being and life-purpose. (There is a mild resemblance here to Wells's short story "The Last Trump" in which an English vicar receives temporary divine inspiration as an angel blows the trumpet referred to in the Revelation According to St John.)[42]

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[40] William Malcolm is scornful of this in his book (p.53).

[41] Paramount Pictures, Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade (1989); story by George Lucas; directed by Stephen Spielberg. Jones and his father compete with Nazis in a search in Egypt for the original Holy Grail.

[42] Wells, "The Last Trump", in The Short Stories of H.G. Wells (London, 1927), pp.655-72.

Mitchell's collection Persian Dawns, Egyptian Nights milks the mystery with comparable assiduity. The Persian Dawns format involves a patient chronicler sifting a large manuscript collection of Bishop Neesan Nerses, a thirteenth-century spiritual-temporal ruler of Alarlu, a small Persian province. Some of the tales are fantastic, others sub-realistic. One, "Cartaphilus" takes place in spiritual-fantasy mode, following the long pilgrimage of Baisan Evid, a disgraced playboy noble, in search of a mysterious itinerant blasphemer and holy man, Cartaphilus. Tracking his quarry through most of the middle east, Evid ends up in a jail to be told by a mysterious Christ-like voice that the man he has been seeking is himself. By his long wandering, he has taken on the qualities of the object of his search. But the tale's most interesting part is where a section of text is repeated word for word. Evid's wanderings take him to Babylon:

> The Golden City of the River rose before his eyes, its minarets blinding blue, mosaic'd with Koranian texts, dazzling in the hot sunshine. High in air, as though hung from the fabled garden of that mythic Babylon that mouldered in dust and legend beyond the river, uprose palace and tower and citadel. And Evid stood and looked at the city, says Nerses, for wonder at its fairness and foulness. For at the gate men hung dripping from brazen hooks set in the walls, crying in age-old torments. So were the city's malefactors executed. (PDEN, pp. 124,132)

The first time that Evid stands and looks, he is soon off elsewhere to continue his search for Cartaphilus. The second time, he sees his former mistress among the ranks of the tortured, denounces such treatment aloud, and causes a riot which ends with his imprisonment and final encounter with the voice. Why should the passage be repeated word for word? It may be partly in order to emphasise the differences of Evid's choices; it also suggests illusion and unreality, despite the final corporeal details. The buildings appear to hang like those of myth and legend, and the light blinds and dazzles, as it does in Egyptian Nights' first, third and fifth tale. Each of stories one, three and five is prefaced as follows:

> Outside the cafe awning the noon-blaze of the sun in the Place of the Green Step was almost liquid. A sakkah, his dripping goatskin slung on his back, slouched through the dust. Then a string of donkeys. A Ford car. A gendarme, with carbine and tarbouche, came loitering along the middle of the street. The trees of the Ezbekieh Gardens lifted their branches to peer over the roof-tops towards us, or to gaze in vegetal surprise at the windows of Sednouai's great clothing Emporium opposite, where flaunted immense notices of the delectable mise-en-vente within. My eyes blinked in the sunlight shimmer. (PDEN, p.161)

A blink in the "liquid" sunlight, and, hey presto! a tale, first "Amber in Cold Sea", then "Camelia Comes to Cairo", then a reworked "Siva Plays the Game". The first two are not particularly worth analysis here; "Siva" has already been discussed. The point here is that Mitchell's games with insubstantiality in his depiction of the East might be defended in terms of proto-magical-realism but might more likely verge on further entanglement with Orientalist cliché.

3.4 East is West: The Potential of Racial Mixing

There is, perhaps, a more useful side to Mitchell making the East strange. Anton Saloney, narrator of Calends of Cairo and The Lost Trumpet, introduces conceits of the East as woman or mirage at the very beginning of the former:

> Many-coloured? It is one of the names of our little Cairo -- Polychromata. She has many names, the Gift of the River, and nowhere do her colours flaunt as here, in the Khalig el Masri. Long the evenings I sat and puzzled till I knew the Khalig and life for one. Key-colour to the kaleidoscope, master-note in the syncopation -- it is Quest. For what? Full bellies and full purses, laughter and love, woman and fame and fantasy; all the so-desired apples of that mirage-orchard that flourishes by the Red Sea. [. . .]
> Eh? A cynic? God mine, I am only a dragoman. (CC p.37)

On the same page, he introduces himself as "Anton Saloney, dragoman, guide, ex-colonel of horse in the army of Deniken and one-time professor of English Literature in the Gymnasium of Kazan." Moving between worlds, the friend of a

number of Westerners and city guide, he is perhaps Mitchell's ultimate cosmopolitan, although he never actually tells a story concerned solely with Egyptians. Given Mitchell's alienated occupational status while in Cairo, it was perhaps wise to concentrate on the Europeans. Nevertheless, many of this predominant group with whom he deals seem anxious to provide slapdash definitions of Cairo and its environs, Saloney himself not least.

Saloney's English speech is vitiated, or enhanced, by a rather strange syntax which jumbles the conventional English word-order. Its origins will not be immediately clear to the average reader, who will see probably see it merely as different. If such a style is a little irritating, it is also attention-catching. This would have been necessary, given the diversity of contents in the Cornhill magazine in which the short stories narrated by Saloney first appeared. It might be seen as an attempt to disorient a white British readership and spring unusual cultural mixtures upon them. The attempt to mix languages and races occurs in much of Mitchell's work; he makes his key spokesman Metaxa in Thirteenth Disciple "the bastard son of an American irrigation official and a Cairene Greek" (p.129). Like Saloney, Metaxa is an unplaceable and unsettling outsider functioning in ways comparable to Michaelis in Lady Chatterley's Lover or Anthony Blanche in Brideshead Revisited.[43] Elsewhere, Mitchell invests time praising the Gorbals ("Glasgow") and London's East End (Stained Radiance) for possessing the greatest ethnic complexity.

In "East is West" Mitchell attempts with some elaboration a counter-move to Kipling's "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet".[44] A very mixed romance and marriage takes place between the Greek Cypriot Simon Mogara, and Englishwoman Joyce Melfort, who turns out to have negro blood a couple of

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[43] See D.H. Lawrence, Lady Chatterley's Lover (Harmondsworth, 1960; first published 1928), pp.21-23, and Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited (Harmondsworth, 1988; first published 1945), pp.34,47.

[44] Rudyard Kipling, "The Ballad of East and West", in Rudyard Kipling's Verse (London, 1940), p.234.

generations back. The affair is prefaced with an extensive blast of Cosmopolitan rhetoric:

> For East is West and West is East; they merge and flow and are the compass-points of a dream. And the little jingo-men who walk the world, lifting here the barrier Nordic and there the flag Mongolian -- in the white hands that raise the banner is the blood of cannibals pre-Aryan, the banner itself is a-flutter with symbols obscene first painted in the jungle towns of Cambodia; the little Jap is a white, a mongrel Ainu, and salutes on his flag the design first graved on the ancient stones of Cuzco!
> Then of race or culture barriers -- I would recognise none? God mine, I can recognise nothing else! (CC p.195)

This creed draws support from Mitchell's Diffusionism; everywhere is linked to everywhere else not merely due to human need and the earth's spherical nature, but in a more intimate sense due to the processes of history, in which all religion and civilisation spread out from Egypt. One recalls the discovery by archaeologists in Image and Superscription, when Central American stonework is found bearing unmistakable relation to that of East Asia (pp.101-03).

Yet Saloney can recognise nothing else but race and culture barriers: whatever the hidden truths of history, anthropology and ethnology, everyday life does not recognise them, and is not as Cosmopolitan as it should be, even in Cairo. Whether this provides adequate justification for Mitchell's collusion with the commonplaces of Orientalism it is difficult to say; what is certain is that he knew his problem to a fair degree, and his best work in the Eastern oeuvre, such as "The Epic", involves the problematising of Western consciousness of itself and the East.

Conclusion

Mitchell's global eclecticism is unarguably impressive. If his travels outside Britain were confined to the Middle East -- the lie to Louis Katin about going on a dig to Central America, repeated by Ivor Brown in his foreword to the Pan Quair, is

worth recalling, as are his ambitions to go to Russia to write propaganda for the Bolsheviks[45] -- his reading took him almost everywhere else. His obsession with foreign names impresses this knowledge upon the reader. The apprehension of a range of cosmopolitan facts and names matters to Mitchell because the truth of Diffusionism depends on the understanding of a world-embracing grand narrative. All the explorations made by his fictional and historical characters may be justified in terms of their eventual contributions, however indirect, to understandings of cultures across the world. If, for Mitchell, history should not have started in the first place, and we would ideally have been living the life of free hunters, we cannot go back to such a past, unless (as in Three Go Back), a freak magnetic storm obliges. Academic history is, or should be, trying to realise Diffusionism's infinite implications in every field, of which Malcom speaks so eagerly in Thirteenth Disciple (p.223); political history is moving towards a world union initially Communist and eventually Anarchist.[46] Mitchell's reservations concerning the plight of the historyless or the victimised by history are strong in the Quair and the unpublished Cairo manuscript. At the same time, small nations such as the Irish, and strong racial interest groups such as the Jews, are in the way of the world's future. Furthermore, despite all the chauvinisms of England and its capital, London functions as the vehicle of history, where Ewan goes at the end of Grey Granite, where the explorers Malcolm and Mungo set out from, where races mix most comprehensively as in the opening lines of Stained Radiance, including Chinamen, Negroes, Bolsheviks, Italians, Jews, Scotsmen and the Welsh. Gay Hunter, as we saw in the "England" chapter, envisions it as a kind of New Jerusalem. Cairo, by contrast, is a place which (though races are correspondingly fascinatingly mixed) consists very much of irrationalism, sensuality and backwardness; a place for glimpses of truth for some of the short stories' characters; a place for the spiritual sojourners of The Lost Trumpet

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45 Jean Baxter, AUL Memoir, p.4.

46 See his letter to Eric Linklater, 10 November 1934, in NLS Acc. 10282.

mystically to find themselves before getting on with the rest of their lives' tasks in other places. While London is the powerhouse of the future, mysterious Cairo is only a dream-house for a hazy mixture of future and past.

On Mitchell's global plan, such a state of affairs is ultimately meant to be a transitory one, and all cities and nations should be encouraged to borrow each others' best features. He even hopes in "Glasgow" that part of Braid Scots may "give lovely lights and shadows" to the "language of Cosmopolis" (ScSc p.146). This enthusiasm for such large-scale mixtures does not impress all cultures alike, as Malcolm Bradbury testifies when describing views that can emerge at international literary conferences:

> To many of the writers from South East Asia and the Pacific [. . .] it is not the arts of [. . .] flamboyant complexity and alienation which matter. Belonging to cultures where the arts are closer to the habitual and the customary, where the oral tradition often dominates over the written [. . .]. To them the very idea of global culture seemed a form of oppression, an aspect of a general new imperialism [. . .]. They were less concerned with the mannerist arts of modernism or postmodernism than the pressure of the general cultural system out of which they arise, the spread of Western commerce and technologies, the dominant power of mass-culture. The world culture that is spreading from the West and penetrating everywhere now is modern Superculture, in a sense everyone's culture and in another sense no one's at all.[47]

Edward Said takes a different tack in relation to this debate in Culture and Imperialism, not quite in direct contradiction to Bradbury but rather simply applying realism:

> Separatist or nativist [literary] enterprises strike me as exhausted; the ecology of literature's new and expanded meaning cannot be attached to only one essence or to the discrete idea of one thing.[48]

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47 Malcolm Bradbury, No, Not Bloomsbury (London, 1987), p.48.

48 Said, Culture and Imperialism (London, 1993), p.386.

The nature of Mitchell's oeuvre suggests that he would have supported Said in respect to literary and cultural matters. Chris's outlook in Sunset Song, though, suggests the strong wish for regional separatism. If this line of thought has been raked over enough by the critics, there still has to be a place for it here to qualify the picture of Mitchell given in some of the above. I am thinking particularly of when Chris receives a telegram informing her of her husband's death in the War. Her regional pride is doomed and futile with regard to Ewan's actual entrapment in the machinery of the British war effort; yet at the same time the intuitions involved are not easily dismissed:

> He wasn't dead, he could never have died or been killed for nothing at all, far away from her over the sea, what matter to him their War and their fighting, their King and their country? Kinraddie was his land, Blawearie his, he was never dead for those things of no concern, he'd the crops to put in and the loch to drain and come back to. It had nothing to do with Ewan this telegram. (SS, p.235)

At the same time, due to the global links forged by exploration, commerce and war, young Ewan's plea in Grey Granite for international solidarity with overseas workers and a strike to stop the export of chemical weapons cannot be dismissed as lightly as xenophobe Geordie Brown wishes with his glib "If you're a Chink or Black, that's your worry" (GG, p.188). The tension between the regional and worldwide in Mitchell's work explored in this chapter is at least as rich and complex as the corresponding tension between the individual and surrounding society.

The last three chapters, "Scotland", "England" and "The Rest of the World", have looked specifically at Mitchell's treatment of certain nations and races. Focus will now become more general in tone. A change such as this is necessary in order to give adequate space for Mitchell's habit (often fuelled by his Diffusionism and Marxism) for generalising, negatively and positively, about the whole human race. He is rarely shy of making high-minded pronouncements on its tragic history, analysing its present psychosexual constitution or speculating on its future. Chapter

five, therefore, will cover Mitchell on humanity with reference to sex, violence and biology (with particular reference to his worries about the tendencies of the human male) before chapter six suggests similarities between Wells's and Mitchell's characters who wish to resign involvement with the humanity around them, due to incompatibility or disgust, in order to realise or even celebrate a defiant selfhood.

Chapter 5: Sex, Violence, and Biology

Introduction

The teeming masses make appearances and are of concern to Mitchell both in their specific Scottish, English or Middle Eastern forms and in their more abstract sense. Depictions of birth and speculations about births en masse, population and contraception crop up regularly in his work. Interests such as these will stem from his crofting origins, where little about reproductive biology could have been hidden for long, from his reading of Darwin and Victorian social scientists on the rapid multiplication of fit and unfit, from his interest in contraception as a live yet insufficiently discussed issue for millions of ordinary people, and (most personally) from guilt at his wife's complications, including eclampsy, during her first pregnancy when they lived in poverty in London.[1]

John Carey's Intellectuals and the Masses is again useful as a summarising source for early twentieth century worries about what Chris Colquohoun refers to as "this matter of humankind itself growing over-large for its clump of earth" (CH, p.188). Carey begins by quoting Ortega y Gasset's Revolt of the Masses (1902) which, reacting to unprecedented European population growth (1800: 180 million; 1914: 460 million), says that Europe had produced "a gigantic mass of humanity which, launched like a torrent over the historic area, has inundated it." In consequence, everywhere on the continent is said to be overcrowded. Carey quotes Wells's similar dismay: the "extravagant swarm of new births" is "the disaster of the nineteenth century."[2]

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[1] For an inadequate account (Ray is simply "seriously ill") see Munro, pp. 43-44; for Ray's personal testimony, see McGrath, p.469.

[2] Carey, p.3.

Intellectuals, governments and the middle classes worry about overpopulation, but not everyone else does the same -- George Orwell, for instance, takes a different view. Orwell shows few signs of thinking population growth is necessarily a bad thing; Nineteen Eighty-Four presents the lively, disgusting, unconquerable world of prole reproduction. Untroubled by the politics of the Anti-Sex League, they will hold fast to their "primitive emotions" and will go about their sexual business regardless. Winston Smith does not have their instinct and regrets it; he has to "learn by conscious effort"[3]. Instinct, though, for Orwell is double-edged, in that sadistic and violent instincts seem almost as natural in Nineteen Eighty Four or Coming up for Air as sexual ones, and may indeed be linked. Healthy animal instinct ties in uncomfortably with brutality.

This link is a constant problem for Mitchell, who in his science fiction wants uninhibited nakedness and "natural" animal behaviour, while at the same time denoting sadism, rape and other equally derogatory associations by the word "beast" and similar terms. The first section of this chapter, "Birth", will therefore be followed by one on "Male Aggression". To be truly human involves for Mitchell negotiating a balance between a healthy animalism and a consciously civilised way of living. His versions of morality are different in different places; he wishes men to control their excesses of aggression, but to be natural; he wants humanity to be "hygienic" and "sanitary" in conduct and thought but loves to *épater les bourgeois* with provocative suggestions of non-standard sexualities. Part three, "Decadence", will be followed by "Hygiene" before a further consideration of "Sex and Violence Writing".

Clean and unclean, healthy and unhealthy, fascinated by what humans are made up of, Mitchell also toys with ideas of mankind evolving different physical features or existing in radically different universes (explored in the final section, "Science Fiction and Fantasy"), before putting such material to the side and implying its whimsical decadence. The kind of humanity Mitchell wants, biologically speaking, is in some

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[3] George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four (London, 1950), p.170; Coming Up for Air (London, 1949); first published 1949 and 1939 respectively.

senses the kind he's got, even if, anthropologically speaking, people are habituated to extreme violence and excessive breeding.

1 Birth

Near the end of Stained Radiance comes a harrowing description of the still-birth of Thea Mayven's child: this takes considerable time. When her husband Garland first sees her, we enter his own mind's phantasmagoria:

> He became aware of a horrifying change. Her lips had closed, were caving in, her eyes seemed gouging from their sockets. Upon the rubber sheet her body curved and twisted, white and bloated, scarred with giant sores upon the poison- laden flesh. (p.259. Note the free verse.)

The intended effect here may be lessened by the sheer exaggeration of this vision: this depends on how much we can identify with Garland's state of neurotic worry. Slightly later, there is this less spectacular and possibly more harrowing view:

> Day after day, night after night she lay, turning her head from side to side, ceaselessly, while a little stream of brown-red acid bubbled from her lips, the while she intoned in plaintive sing-song [. . .]. (p.272)

She eventually survives, but only just, after a prognosis of likely death. Poor, and for a time homeless, Thea is only hospitalised at the last moment, attended now and again by the odd available nurse or doctor.

The births in Sunset Song do not have even the luxury of a hospital, taking place in the home, with one experienced if harassed doctor on hand. Chris is unavoidably acquainted with her mother's experience, albeit from the other side of a door, supplying the doctor with hot towels which rapidly become "clairted with stuff she didn't dare look at" (p.33). Her father accuses himself of succumbing to the lusts of the flesh (p.34 -- Will soon fills Chris in on the link between father and pregnancy) and then

> they heard an awful scream that made them leap to their feet, it was as though mother were being torn and torn in the teeth of beasts and couldn't thole it longer; and then a screech like a young pig followed that scream and they tried not to hear any of the sounds above them. (p.34)

The twins are born, the doctor comes out, and "the smell of his hands was a horror that haunted Chris day and night" (p.35). While Mitchell approves very much of various types of other "natural" processes, the sight, sound, smell, the imagined feel and general horror of the process of childbirth has a remarkable hold over him.

The beast inside the womb emerges again as Chris is in labour with Ewan:

> [T]he beast moved away from her breasts, scrabbled and tore and returned again, it wasn't a beast, red-hot pincers were riving her apart. Riven and riven she bit on her lips, the blood on her tongue, she couldn't bite more, she heard herself scream then, twice. (p.189-190)

One husband along in the town of Segget, Chris becomes pregnant again. The gossip Dite Peat remarks on her slim form: "I warrant the doctor'll need his bit knives" (CH, p.146). The Segget gossips are disgusted with the crudity of this, but appear to think the same thing in slightly different words. It seems gratuitous for Mitchell as well as for Dite Peat. The scene that follows Chris's exhausted attempt to find Robert on the night of the explosion follows familiar lines as she gives birth, foregrounding

> the stuff that spilt from her mouth on the sheet, not red, it was brown, and she suddenly saw, vividly clear and distinct, it was awful, horror and horror in Robert's face. (p.153)

The baby, quickly baptised as Michael (p.156) lives only half an hour. In a Mitchell poem dating from mid-1926 entitled "Michael" we find that "unborn", the poem's subject "friended us". He was a "child of dreams" and of "desire", and is now "[f]ar from the troubled ways of travail'd earth".[4] This child of Chris's again

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4 "Michael", NLS MS 26058, f.10.

involves strong reference to the personal history of Ray and Leslie Mitchell: it was in 1926 that their child was born (named not "Michael" but Ray) and lived just three days.[5]

Indebted in several ways to the Quair is James Barke's The Land of The Leal (1939) with its memorable childbirth scene which takes place without the benefit of the doctor, who comes in later to deal with a difficult afterbirth which causes even more distress.[6] Mitchell may be admired for bringing authenticity about such cases into the Scottish novel. Suspicions may arise of exploitative sensationalism when he gives us fairly detailed depictions of childbirth in Stained Radiance and the Quair. The scenes, however, are very much bound up with his concern for the issues surrounding birth and its consequences. John Guthrie's wife Jean finds giving birth time after time unbearable and protests to her husband, who sternly tells her they will accept what "God in his mercy" has in store (SS, p.28). This is echoed by Robert Colquohoun much later,who claims that births are "god's concern" (CH, p.189). As a result of Guthrie's intransigence, Jean commits suicide the next time she becomes pregnant. In Niger it is noticed that Mungo Park's mother Mistress Park is "perpetually bowed in the ungracious lines of pregnancy" (p.10); Malcom Maudslay in The Thirteenth Disciple shows a historically retrospective fascination with the idea of childbearing, although he gets the century wrong:

> "If only we knew the private opinions of the wife of that prig and poetaster, John Donne! -- She bore twelve children in sixteen years, that pale, ghostly, eighteenth-century wife, and died in child-bed. The Sunday following her death Donne preached a sermon on the text 'Behold in me a man afflicted'". (p.17)

Malcom is distinctly unimpressed. The contraception Donne's wife could have

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[5] See McGrath, p.13.

[6] James Barke, The Land of the Leal (Edinburgh, 1987) , pp.169-77. First published 1939.

done with makes an appearance in the Quair when birth control lectures begin in Segget after "bairns came as thick as ever they'd come" (CH, pp.194-5: proliferation, not intelligence). In Duncairn Ellen Johns takes a laudably serious attitude to it, mentioning the subject to Chris, reading about it, and then going to a man who is "unemotional as a boiled turnip" in order to get a device of some kind to facilitate safe sex with Ewan (GG, pp.78,150).

Ian Campbell points out "The Land"'s acknowledgement that contraception has reduced the size of farmers' families.[7] Contraception, or rather opposition to it, features in Stained Radiance as well, as a bar to the procreative desires of Andreas van Koupa. Interested in his butler's fertility, he asks if he believes in birth control. The answer is negative. Koupa is curious:

> "Why not? Have you any children?"
> "I am not married, sir."
> "Ah. But if you were would you reproduce yourself as endlessly as possible? Why? Do you not think, the good detached billions of atoms preferable in their detachment to being agglomerated into young Clellands?"
> "My brother, sir, a grocer in Bethnal Green, is married. He has three very nice children."
> "And he proposes still continuing arranging more? [. . .]"
> "His wife is a healthy woman, sir." (SR, pp.285-6)

As a result of this illumination, he decides to impregnate his wife:

> If a Clelland adventured in arranging the so-little atoms, might not a Koupa? Even though on the fat sow. [. . .] She would object. She believed and practised the contraceptive methods that in a civilised society would have damned eternally her own chances of appearing on the earth. [. . .] But she would do as he said.
> With the humorous cruelty of a tiger and the wistfulness of a little child in his heart, Andreas Koupa knocked on the door. (p.288)

Natural male desire, if Koupa's can be called natural, involves the urge to force

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[7] Campbell, p.21.

women into childbearing (this happens perhaps among the Royal Family, who according to Garland "breed like rabbits" (p.115)). Mitchell does not like this, and often derogates male urges of various kinds, prompting Keith Dixon to call him "a man inhabited by phallophobia".[8] Often, despite the strong characterisations of women such as Chris Guthrie, Gay Hunter or Domina Riddoch (see Thirteenth Disciple) the male is a beast, and the female a sufferer.

2 Male Aggression

2.1 The Treatment of Rape

Mitchell's ideal society in Three Go Back is completely free from rape, because males follow the rules. Every year men can ask women to partner them, but if rejection follows, no further wooing is possible:

> A man had crossed the open space, walked the line, and made selection of a woman. [. . .] The woman shook her head. Thereat the hunter, after a moment's hesitation, walked back to the place from which he had come. (p.141).

Thirteenth Disciple is also idealistic on this score. Malcom addresses Domina:

> "Suppose any chance acquaintance -- myself -- were to attempt to rape you on this hill, what would you do?" [. . .]
> "If I wanted you to, I'd go shares. If I didn't -- I'd punch your head." (p.195)

Domina's implication that she *might want* to be *raped* is an odd one. It might be that this is a linguistic problem; Malcom happens to start by asking about rape to be provocative, and Domina takes on the word as shorthand for lovemaking, because it couldn't be rape, by definition, unless it was against her will. However, the exchange

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[8] Dixon, "Letting the Side Down", p. 274.

seems to imply that sudden sexual assault on a woman is acceptable on the off-chance that she might really want it, and if she does not, she only has to beat the man up and disengage herself. Good enough for real women, no doubt, as Mitchell's female protagonists generally are. Real gentlemen would no doubt accept the hint immediately on rejection, although some gentlemen like Mitchell's Mungo Park in Niger, billed as a proto-feminist (N, p.24), would never contemplate such an act in the first place. Park patiently suffers the curious attentions of African women, including requests to display his private parts, with all dignity possible in the circumstances (pp.135-137).

History shows that most men have not behaved in this gentlemanly way. In Gay Hunter the subject is referred to on Rem and Gay's wedding night, as the latter thinks of all the victimisation that she has escaped from. If with her primitive lover Rem (as in the partnership of Clair Stranlay and her Cro-Magnon lover in Three Go Back) she has an entirely equal, non-exploitative relationship, her forebears have had it differently:

> She thought of the brides throughout the thousands of years of civilisation -- the willing and unwilling, the child-brides of India, the obscene rites of betrothal and marriage, veiling and unveiling, the dirty jests and the lewd comments. She thought of fantastic rites of sacrifice, of brides who gave the first night to a priest or a stranger, of the seigneur's right in ancient France [. . .]. (GH, p.98)

In Cloud Howe the idea of the *droit de seigneur* crosses young Laird Mowat's mind. During a tense confrontation with Chris about political alignment in Segget, he thinks "had it been four hundred years back, he'd have tamed that look quick enough in his bed" (p.105) This encapsulates Mowat's outlook with some economy. The argument is about politics but Chris is nevertheless conceptualised in terms of her sexuality; the mastering of her body, even by rape, implies for Mowat the mastering of her mind, and he wishes he could turn the clock back to legalise rape on the basis of privileged lineage. Mitchell has been accused in various quarters of hysteria: how much better he would have written, Douglas Gifford writes, had he adopted Neil

Gunn's quiet serenity and understatement.[9] But in this scene, making Mowat think of "tam[ing] that look in his bed" is effective understatement.

Stained Radiance contains many references to male abuse of power: the decadent *flâneur* Andreas Koupa commits a kind of rape before he gets to his wife, weeping in the arms of his Salvation Army prostitute companion, and then making a sudden and decisive pass at her: she obviously does not want sex, but seems to resign herself to it to avoid confrontation (p.98). Ewan in Sunset Song is even nastier when he comes home brutalised by his army training. First Chris is subjected to long stories of whoring, and then she finds him "hot and questing and wise as his hands had never been" (p.223) as he hurries her to bed, leaving the light on. Afterwards she remembers,

> lying in the darkness the while she slept, why he had left the lamp alight; and at memory of that foulness something cold and vile turned and turned like a wheeling mirror inside her brain. for it had been other things than his beast-like mauling that had made her whisper in agony, *Oh Ewan, put out the light!* The horror of his eyes she would never forget, they burned and danced on that mirror that wheeled and wheeled in her brain. (p.225)

Dalziel of the Meiklebogs in Cloud Howe is, unlike Ewan, a beast full-time. There is "something in his shyness that made [Chris] shiver"; "he looked to Chris like a Highland bull, with his hair and horns and maybe other things" (p.31). Her intuitions are correct: he takes home Else Queen from the Segget Show, and suddenly begins to manhandle her.

> [H]e louped on her as a crawly beast loups, something all hair and scales from the wall, or an old black monkey; she bashed him hard, right in the eye, just once, and then he had her. She had thought she was strong, but she wasn't, in a minute they had struggled half-way to the great box-bed. She saw once his face in the light of the candle, and that made her near sick and she loosed her grip, he looked just as ever, canny and shy, though his hands upon her were like iron clamps.

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9 Gifford, p.147.

> She cried *You're tearing my frock*, he half-loosed her, he looked shy as ever, but he breathed like a beast.
> *Ah well, we'll take the bit thing off, Else.* (p.79)

Disturbingly, there is something of the loveable rogue in Dalziel with his final one-liner. On the other hand, the scene is cut at just the right point to prevent any serious sense of complicity between Dalziel and the (male?) reader. The narration is done largely from Else's point of view, giving the horror from her perspective as she experiences total loss of power. Rape seems to be taken less seriously in Grey Granite, when Ake blackmails Jimmy the Provost to secure advantages for himself and then freedom for Ewan. Ake has no concern for what happened to the girl: it just seems amusing that he has caught up with an old friend and knows what he did under a hedge a long time ago. The provost himself believes it to be fairly standard and unremarkable behaviour: " a small mistake in his youth- was he the first childe to rape a lass in a hedge, with a bit of darkness to hide his identity?" (p.142)

There are many who are less bothered about the business in Spartacus. Gaius Cassius, infected with leprosy and venereal disease, uses the resources of an entire stud farm of young boys and girls to satisfy his various lusts. He is "a man of culture" and a "patrician" (p.124); Mitchell wishes us to believe that his practices are characteristic of large numbers of respectable Romans. Attitudes to this seem to differ among the slaves. Kleon's original manifesto seems to be that no one should be slave to another (see p.4). Yet Lavinia, the captured high-born Roman lady, is a veritable sex-slave to Spartacus:

> And that night, when at length she drew shudderingly back from his arms, far off and ringingly she heard a wolf howl, and, harlot though she was, listened with quivering nostrils. (p.92)

Whatever one makes exactly of the wolf howling, its hazy suggestiveness points to an unpleasant time for her in bed. Is Spartacus justified in his actions, given the Lavinia's immoral? The issue is left open. His own wife Elpinice, however, left

behind in a house in the hills because she is pregnant -- yet another of Mitchell's pregnancies -- has been raped until she is dead. This is presented with another deadpan understatement: "Before they fired the house they took the woman in her bed. Many of them" (p.83). Lavinia's rape and torture represent, in a small way, revenge for the many Roman crimes of this kind. It is more a matter for explanation than judgement.

There is, then, much directly sexual violence and much violence that is not sexual. In every Mitchell novel without exception, someone is physically brutal to someone else; the brutality is without doubt most heavily concentrated in Spartacus, probably followed by Image and Superscription.

2.2 War, Violence, Sadism

Spartacus, the story of a continual, bloody war of slave rebellion, has often been charged with exploiting violence for its own sake.[10] Defending it, William Malcolm compares its brutal honesty to that of Homer's Iliad.[11] This suggests, however, a casual reading of Homer. For alongside the Iliad's recognition of corporeal materiality and death there is a kind of stylised innocence. This passage is a typical one:

> He did not make an idle cast, for the sharp stone caught Hector's driver Cebriones [. . .] on the forehead, with the horses' reins in his hands. It shattered both his eyebrows, crushing in the bone; and his eyes fell out and rolled in the dust at his feet. He dropped from the well-built chariot like a diver and yielded up his life.[12]

For a closer parallel, Malcolm might have looked to the orgiastic tortures and massacres of Flaubert's Salammbo, picked out for approbation by Malcom Maudslay

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[10] See Munro, introduction to his edition of Spartacus (London, 1970).

[11] Malcolm, p.117.

[12] Homer, The Iliad, trans. by E.V. Rieu, (Harmondsworth, 1985), p.312.

in his reading list in Thirteenth Disciple on p.37.[13] Mitchell's wars are closer to Flaubert's, written about in a more knowing and nasty way than Homer's:

> The slaves of the mines went mad in a lust for revenge, delighting in torments, bathing their arms to the shoulders in blood, tearing the entrails from still-living bodies. (Spartacus, p.40)

> Waves of agony were going through him [. . .] one strand [of barbed wire] was between his legs, the spikes of it updriven deep and turned there, two bound his chest and one his shoulders and one had tangled and twined, living, like a snake that scoriated, about his legs (I and S, p.198)

> That agony itself sent searching fingers, long-nailed, far up in his body, they scraped the pelvis and tore at his entrails. "I think that I fainted then. It was quite night when I woke again, hearing my own moans [. . .]." There was the smell of excrement and the smell of caked blood on his chest. (ibid, p.200)

Spartacus has many examples of this kind; The Thirteenth Disciple has Malcom's best friend Metaxa die on the wire (finally bayonetted to end the agony by Malcom himself). This compares with Gershom's near-death experience in Image and Superscription. Valentine Cunningham suggests that the writing one finds in the Thirties concerning war and extreme violence is a delayed reaction to the numbing experience of World War One:

> Suddenly, towards the end of the 20's, the blocked-up dam of bad memories, nightmares, trauma had burst and memoirs, volumes of letters, novels, autobiographies, and other troops-(rather than generals-) centred books began to pour torrentially forth.[14]

Alongside a catalogue of troops' memories of violence, Cunningham lists a host of novels and poems of the period such as Auden's Dance of Death and Dylan Thomas's "The Burning Baby" involving non-military and non-political violence, which, he

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[13] Gustave Flaubert, Salammbo , trans. by M. French Sheldon (London, 1886; first published 1862). See ch.14 for the crucifixion of Hanno, or ch.15 for the death of Matho.

[14] Cunningham, p.44.

suggests reflect a general mood. The list also includes work inspired by recent, specific violence. Stephen Spender's Vienna is about Dollfuss's massacres of the Austrian Social Democrats in 1934; Walter Greenwood's Love on the Dole deals with recent British demonstrations.[15]

Explanations can be given, then, for the pervasiveness of violence Mitchell's work: in terms of the influence of the thirties, in terms of virile Scottish writing. Grey Granite has a fight scene in the Gowans and Gloag yard between Ewan and Alick that is viewed by Alan Bold, non-judgmentally, as a standard Scottish intertext: "Ewan [. . .] is no soft touch and takes on tough Alick Watson in the kind of pugilistic set-piece we expect from Scottish fiction".[16] Scottishness does not tie in immediately, though, with fight scenes set elsewhere, such as this one in Image and Superscription:

> Okay. Then we'll lift your skin again, see. Will you or won't you sell over Rainier's to the Vigilance Committee at the price we've said? [. . .]
> He was to think it probable that Betz never knew the thing that struck him. He went down with the butt of Gershom's revolver raising a dark matting of red on his hair, he stumbled against the Lutheran pastor. The latter staggered and struck with his whip at Gershom, but the woman [. . .] seized his right arm and while she held it Gershom kicked the pastor, quickly and vigorously, and she saw him double and fall, clawing at his belly. (pp.279,280)

This example recalls innumerable stories of the thriller genre, complained about by George Orwell in "Raffles and Miss Blandish"[17] and parodied by Hoggart in The Uses of Literacy:

> Suddenly Fatsy brought his knee hard up into Herb's groin. Herb's face came down sharp and

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15 W . H. Auden, The Dance of Death (London, 1933); Dylan Thomas, "The Burning Baby", Contemporary Poetry and Prose (May, 1936), no.1, pp.10-14; Stephen Spender, Vienna (London, 1934); Arthur Greenwood, Love on the Dole (London, 1933).

16 Bold, p.137.

17 George Orwell, "Raffles and Miss Blandish", The Penguin Essays of George Orwell (Harmondsworth, 1984), pp.263-74. "Raffles" first published 1944.

> Fatsy met it with a ham-like fist. The knuckles splintered the bone and made blood and flesh squelch like a burst pomegranate. Herb fell back to the tiled floor, retching teeth. He was bubbling gently as he lay there, so Fatsy gave him one in the belly with his steel-shod shoe. Then -- just for luck -- Fatsy ground his foot straight on to the squelchy mess that useter be Herb's face.[18]

Violence in Mitchell should also be considered in relation to a crucial passage in Orwell's Coming Up For Air:

> Old Porteous' mind, I thought, probably stopped working at about the time of the Russo-Japanese war. And it's a ghastly thing that nearly all the decent people, the people who *don't* want to go round smashing faces in with spanners, are like that.[19]

Or with Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four, as O'Brien addresses his victim: "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face -- for ever".[20] (If using Orwell here and later in connexion with Mitchell seems a little anachronistic, it may be; it is worthwhile, though, because of the way Orwell crystallises issues and feelings. Certainly Valentine Cunningham uses Nineteen Eighty-Four to emphasise Orwell's face-smashing in connection with the thirties.)[21]

Mitchell's views on this kind of violence are never entirely clear, but he does repeat the wish and the enactment. Ewan's workmate Alick does not like his immediate boss: "And Alick said when the foreman was gone what he'd like to give the bastard was one in the guts, syne dance on his face with tacketty boots" (GG p.46). Scabs actually do get their faces danced on by the militant strikers at Gowans:

> You pushed a foot in front of one of the bastards, down he went with a bang on the calsays, somebody stepped on his mouth and his teeth went crunch. (p.120)

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18 Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy (Harmondsworth, 1978), p.265. First published 1959.

19 Orwell, Coming Up For Air, p.163.

20 Orwell, Nineteen Eighty Four, p.273-74.

21 Cunningham, p.66.

There is no overt authorial condemnation of this brutality, but the point of view is that of the strikers, suggesting approval of their casual violence. It is not fair, however, when government action amounts to "kicking in the faces of the poor" (CH, p.199), or when Ewan is literally attacked by the Duncairn police; or (in Jim Trease's anticipation) when the same crew might "kick in his [Jim's] skull" (GG, p.147). Elsewhere, Long Rob begins smashing minister Gibbon's face in Sunset Song out of an amusing, whimsical curiosity, though Tony the daftie stops him with some common sense (p.198) and Malcom Maudslay in Thirteenth Disciple starts beating up his tormentor in the army, beginning by "pulping the obscene little face" (p.121). There is also a section in Mitchell's Niger where Mungo Park, strongly provoked, by a capricious African tribe, wishes to hit his tormentors and "feel the pleasure of bones breaking beneath his hands" (N, p.140). Needless to say, Mungo does not record such an impulse in his Travels.

Mitchell tries to make a differentiation, which may not be wholly convincing, between violence as simple direct expression of hatred, as with Alick and the anonymous striker, and violence as stimulus to orgiastic excitement. Wee Geordie Bruce is the figure who goes too far in Grey Granite:

> Christ, the place was splottered in blood, wee Geordie went out and glowered all about it and nearly got down on his knees to lick it, with his wee shrivelled face and shifty eyes, awful keen on blood and snot. (p.45)

> [Geordie speaking:] nothing like a schlorich of blood to give a chap a bit of a twist in the wame. (p.177)

Corporal Wilson is his equivalent in The Thirteenth Disciple, being "An atavistic little pervert who found a strange, mouth-drooling pleasure in blood and suffering" (p.120). The cast of Spartacus is basically sex-starved and savage: this does not make certain impulses forgiveable or palatable: "Even with [Lavinia's] tortured body in evidence, some of them still desired her: for those wounds added a strange and

loathsome fascination" (p.114). (Is this an original stroke of Mitchell's, or did he pick it up elsewhere?) These last few quotations are the clearest statements about sadistic perversity; the most horrible example of violence as stimulus-to-pleasure, though, comes in Stained Radiance. The salient facts are these: Pilot Officer Brougham, hated by lowly airman John Garland, has a nasty accident at the airfield, witnessed, among others, by Garland, who has been suffering from writer's block in the early stages of writing a novel. As he looks on,

> Something shapeless had been dragged out of the geyser. The driver of the fire-tender, a boy, a recruit, stared down a it, white-faced.
> Then he began to scream.
>
> Subchapter (iv)a.
> Late in that evening, while the remains of Pilot Officer Brougham lay in the mortuary, a camp Policeman, passing the headquarters, heard the sound of a typewriter. He went up to one of the windows and looked into a lighted room. Seated at a table, his face glowing, Garland was triumphantly engaged in the seduction of his heroine. (p.90)

On the evidence of the novel as a whole, these events are connected. It is full of meaningful encounters between apparently unconnected people, of chance events that are more than chance, and climax of the plot is when Garland moves with formulaic predictability into Storman's job as secretary of the Anarcho-Communist Party, after the latter's resignation. Subchapter (iv)a is not an exercise in fragmentation, but an oblique reminder from Mitchell that witnessing violent death can excite the mind sexually and creatively. Elsewhere in the novel, males are seen as all the same by Garland:

> Lord, what an unending tweeter, in fiction and in fact, the insects on their mud-ball raised over the matter of procreation. What the immortal pipings of appeal and fear and hate they raised over some male wrongfully fertilising some female. (She never wanted that larva.) (p.88)

At one stage of the next novel, The Thirteenth Disciple, Malcom Maudslay

understandably concludes that "Blood-lust was our heritage" (p.125). The beast is seen in the Quair's rapes, in Spartacus's action all the way through, and in the torture in Image and Superscription. The idea of man as beast is *supposed* to be refuted in The Thirteenth Disciple, in Image and Superscription, Gay Hunter and Three Go Back when the truth about civilisation and the diffusion of culture becomes known. Domina in Thirteenth Disciple (p.196) claims to know about peaceful matriarchies originally existing in Europe by the Seine as part and parcel of her argument that there is no reason for a child born in the future to know the identity of its father -- Malcom reflects and appears to agree. Mitchell writes about the matriarchies of the Rhine in "Antique Scene" (p.125) and among the critics Zagratzki uses this idea most forcefully as a demonstration of Mitchell's feminism.[22] These fragments of theory and others suggest that the human race is not bound to be ruled by males, and males are not genetically/ biologically determined to be sadistic beasts; we are only conditioned into this by the forces of the state, of religion, of the military-industrial complex, and so on. This stance has a logic of a kind, but runs into problems in Mitchell's fiction. Will there ever be a way back to males behaving themselves? The scenes of torture are more compelling and more credible than the scenes of hunter-gatherer harmony; the phallic towers of Gay Hunter impress more than the hunters' camp fires, despite the garishness of the former:

> Great escarpments of metal platforms wound like the corridors of a ziggurat pyramid high in the air where once (she thought) St Paul's had been; and above that towering structure, dominating all the city, a great pointed pillar rose in the clouds -- it rose a full mile into the clouds. Even at that distance she could see its shape and symbolism. So that was what had replaced the Cross.
> The Phallus. (p.147)

The weakness of the writing here is betrayed by the thudding use of a short sentence for dramatic effect. However, this reflects one of Mitchell's constant preoccupations; he often denounces the savagery of male-dominated ideologies like

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[22] Zagratzki, p.50.

fascism. One could ascribe to Mitchell here a touch of sophistication and credit the passage with self-consciousness of a sort in its implication that as the penis of *homo sapiens* always measures less than a mile long, the *symbolic* Phallus and *actual* penis are two very different things. The phallus achieves aggressive and frightening status precisely in a society run by aggressive men. But given Mitchell's stress on mankind being made up of (occasionally intelligent) animals, there is nothing to prevent human instincts involving animal savagery. The majority of male mammals are stronger and more aggressive than their female counterparts. The violent threats to modern civilisation discussed in the first chapter will go on being threatening, while ideas about original innocence and noble savages appear insubstantial, especially when the male half of the human race, Mungo Park aside, appears to consist of rapists and thugs.

We are, furthermore, shown to be more than animals, with the capacity to be more perverse. We not only enjoy hurting each other; some of us enjoy being hurt as well. In a Mitchell novel one important thing is that someone should enjoy someone being hurt.

2.3 Masochism

Mitchell lingers on the feelings of those suffering intensely, often in a context of deliberate torture. Granted, the pain of childbirth and that of several of Mitchell's characters in war, if not exactly accidental, are not the result of such a specific malevolence -- although in one case John Guthrie, and in the other case governments and barbed wire manufacturers, bear a substantial amount of blame). In Spartacus and Grey Granite, though, we see torture quite deliberately applied. There is no question here of an admission as such that Brennus, Kleon or Ewan are enjoying what they are getting, but Mitchell's persistent interest in certain scenes gives one pause:

> And all that night, as the inflammation burgeoned in hands and feet, Brennus hung from the cross. As the morning came in a red flow of light, the Romans saw his tongue hanging out thick and swollen from his lips; with the greater heat of the day flies came to vex him, the legionaries passed by below, indifferent to the humming clouds or the thickening odours of excrement. (Spartacus p.148)

> And by morning on the long lines of crosses the slaves hung with blackened tongues projecting from swollen lips, and glazed eyes, and the drooling moans of stricken beasts. [. . .] And then pain tore at [Kleon], and like the others he babbled curses and complaints, and bit at his lips and his teeth; and something like a wheel that was spiked with fire turned and turned in his brain, and he knew that it might not endure, that death any instant must come, because no agony like this could last [. . .]. The spiked wheel in his brain grew and grew until it filled the sky. (ibid. pp.208-9)

> Two of them held him while Sim Leslie bashed him, then they knocked him from fist to fist across the cell, body blows in the usual Duncairn way with Reds [. . .]. Ewan had heard a queer bubbling, himself blowing breath through bloody lips [. . .]. [T]heir fumblings at last brought a scream shrilling up in his throat [. . .]. [T]hey did shameful things to his body [. . .]. And a kind of stinging bliss came upon him, that he was that army [of the downtrodden] itself -- (GG, pp.135-6)

After reading about Brennus during crucifixion, we should have the idea of what goes on, but Mitchell seems determined to repeat the experience again when Kleon's turn comes. It is true that because of the collapse of the rebellion the novel needs to conclude on a realistically sombre note; the necessity for all of the detail is a moot point. Ewan's torture is a tremendously powerful scene, because the Quair has had nothing like it up to that point. His "stinging bliss" calls for comment; while acknowledging its reference to a sense of political rightness and heroic solidarity, coming at the position it does the phrase unavoidably suggests a degree of masochism, a happiness that because the pain is so great it makes Ewan a fully worthy class warrior.

Ewan is not averse to attributing mild masochism to others: at the New Year Dance he wishes:

> to stop and go mad and strip Ellen naked, the secret small cat, slow piece on piece, and kiss every piece a million times over, and hit her hard, till it hurt, and kiss the hurts till pain and cure and kisses were one- mad, oh, mad as hell tonight. (GG p.108)

As it happens, it is Ellen who kisses *his* hurts better and relieves him of the fear that he is impotent (one could also cite John Guthrie's threat to castrate Will and Cuddiesdon's treatment of the daftie in Sunset Song, Kleon's castration in Spartacus, Dreaichie's presumed castration by his housekeeper in Stained Radiance and Gershom's fear for his genitalia in Image and Superscription). Carol Anderson sees Ewan's sadistic wishes with respect to Ellen as evidence that Mitchell is stacking the cards against Ewan.[23] Not so; all women want it, on the evidence of Gay Hunter, liberated female archetype:

> Gay closed her eyes and drew down his head, and kissed him in a fashion that made him lift her from the ground in a grip that she feared would crack every bone in her body . . . Fun to die that way. (GH, p.124)

Just a wild thought, perhaps. Mitchell does forcefully dissociate himself from a certified masochist and flagellant, Swinburne no less, in the same novel: he is a "tormented, castrated poseur" (p.100). Sometimes Mitchell advocates a healthy normality, an avoidance of Swinburne-style perversion, and a pursuit of keeping things clean; at other times his desire triumphs to say with the early Auden "yes, we are nasty, you are right",[24] and revel in unwholesomeness.

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23 Anderson, p.373.

24 W .H. Auden, "A Communist to Others", in The Twentieth Century (September, 1932)

3 Decadence

The Lost Trumpet and Stained Radiance are Mitchell's boldest novels in this area, although the latter sees decadence making an occasional cameo appearance while the former is suffused with such an atmosphere. One of the memorable characters in The Lost Trumpet is Quaritch the novelist. Crazily dressed, constantly drunk and obscene, and vomiting periodically, he is known in Cairo as "The Little Brother of the Brothels", and calls himself "a wandering intestinal worm". His novels have been banned, and he shouts scraps of schoolboy-ribald song about Solomon sleeping with his fathers. One of the novel's memorable locations is a peculiar ballroom where two women, Norwegian Aslaug Simonssen and Russian Princess Pelagueya Bourrin, dance together in frenzied and sensuous fashion in contrast to the awkward and sexless performances of the other couples on the floor. Vague, dark talk of this kind is to follow:

> "I knew as soon as I looked at her that no one had danced with her as she should be danced with. So I set to awakening her" . . .
> "There is danger in some awakenings." (p.155)

"Decadence" is, of course, a term given meaning through cultural context. A working definition of the word will be that which exceeds contemporary bounds of taste: two women behaving in quasi-lesbian fashion in a nightclub could hardly be considered decadent in the 1990s; The Lost Trumpet was published in 1932, one year before the appearance of Mario Praz's Romantic Agony, a study and virtual anthology of perversion in nineteenth century literature. "Of all the monstrosities which pullulate in the fiction of this period" he remarks, "lesbians are the most popular".[25] The tone implies that there could never be anything natural in lesbian desire; it has to represent a

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[25] Mario Praz, Romantic Agony, trans. by Angus Davidson (London, 1950), p.332. First published in English, 1933.

warped transgressive urge.The fascination with bizarre forms of death also occupies Praz; The Lost Trumpet shows its heritage again here.[26] One throwaway line from the narrator is: "Marrot had jumped like a criminal in the chair of humane America as the volts of American justice are propelled through the criminal body." (p.204) However he might try to pass off the depiction of nastiness as vital to his socially-concerned polemical purpose, the analogy gives Mitchell away as a mere reveller in strangeness. There is also space for other methods of death: the possibility of being hanged is discussed, but from an unconventional angle, from a poem of Wilde's ("a not-so-clean little English genius"):

> T'is sweet to dance to violins
> When love and life are fair,
> To dance to lutes, to dance to flutes
> Is delicate and rare;
> But it is not sweet with dangling feet
> To dance upon the air! (p.143)

Quoting this is a naughty thing to do: from Wilde's sincerest, most moral poem, The Ballad of Reading Gaol, Mitchell extracts the most decadent verse, and makes it seem, in the novel's context, much more so; the kicking of the hanged victim is wholly aestheticised here.[27]

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Mitchell makes use of an East charged with perverted sexuality. Praz sees Flaubert (precursor for Mitchell and classic case-in-point for Said) as having "a taste for the lecherous, blood-stained Orient" and needs to travel to "strange and monstrous countries".[28] If Mitchell's short story "The Lost Prophetess" is relatively discreet (perhaps due to the demands of form) where the

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[26] Praz, pp.23-50.

[27] Oscar Wilde, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol", in Complete Works, pp.843-60 (846). "Ballad" first published 1898.

[28] Praz, p.150.

heroine suffers "all the slow, evil cruelty of the idle and the sex-obsessed" (CC, p.60) the Lost Trumpet sex-show scene is not. In retaliation for her driving him at high speed and with deliberate recklessness through Cairo in a bizarre double-suicide bid, Colonel Saloney takes his rich lover Pelagueya through some of the lowest dens of the city, and piles on the hyperbole in a passage, some of which has been quoted in the last chapter, as we are taken to

> places where children had run after us with unclean demands and invitations; places no tourist had ever penetrated, dark, lost courtyarded houses emitting screams of pain as we passed; houses and dens where the harem-rule remained intact and slaves were beaten with heavy whips [. . .].
> I took her down to through the Bab-el-Zuweiya -- into that wilderness of abandoned khans where strange trades, ancient and evil as the East itself, are still plied: where the scum of Europe's dance-halls carry on in secret lamplit rooms unclean entertainment for the smuggled audiences. We had passed through shaded doors and down twisting corridors and so through other doors, after the makings of passwords and signs, into one of those lamplit theatres; we had sat side by side watching the Gomorrhan horrors enacted in the sweating silence, with the light so low that others also present -- we seemed the only white people there -- were dim and faceless [. . .]. Perhaps she was the only white woman who had ever seen that vileness [. . .]. They led the woman and the animal -- both bewildered, dull-eyed automata -- off through the musk-stenching curtains at last. (p.125,126,127)

The "Gomorrhan horrors" and "sweating silence" camp it up to an almost absurd degree. If any evidence for an anti-pornographic stance may be found here, it is on the insistence that woman and beast (which one?) are "dull-eyed automata": such obscenity, it is forcefully asserted, brings no joy; the whole thing is dead for its actual participants. Why, though, should Mitchell spend so much time on it? The place has already been introduced thus:

> From a side-alley came the monstrous beat of music to the obscene posturings of some hidden dancer. The air had a charnel-house smell. And, unempty, there was no true being or sound in that place. It was a place of fetid ghosts.
> "This" I said, " Is the Wagh el Berkha, the street of prostitutes." (p.125)

One of the residents is Huth Rizq, the mysterious blind prostitute suspected of murdering her evil Norwegian lover. Rizq is later to die at peace when she finally blows the Lost Trumpet. Again, reference to Praz can enable us to compare Mitchell's work with the decadence of the previous century:

> Lovely beggar-maids, seductive hags, fascinating negresses, degraded prostitutes -- all these subjects, which the seventeenth century had treated lightheartedly and as jeux d'esprit, are to be found again, but with the bitter taste of reality, in the Romantics, and especially in [. . .] Baudelaire.[29]

Stained Radiance also has a degraded prostitute. While working in London for the Anarcho-Communists, Andreas Koupa occasionally consorts with a prostitute-cum salvation army worker who is unhappy with the mixing of roles but has little alternative. Her speech is vivid Cockney: "A cup o biled tea after free hours work on the streets. Prayers an blood an God's all they fink ev. [. . .] Daft bawstid!" (p.94) In a later scene Koupa fondles her as if she were an animal, revelling in touching "one who walks the streets in honest prostitution" and who has "the so-authentic whiff of the little kennels" (pp.211-12).

Dutch in origin but with heady experience of Russian revolutionary romanticism and Cairene prostitution, Koupa himself has made a living in Paris by "writing obscene little sex stories which were privately printed and sold in brothels to English soldiers". In Cairo he has given up a job as guide to live with

> a Greek harlot from Lemnos. There, in an attic, close to the stars, he sat all day drinking Greek brandy and writing verses, the while the woman earned their bread. Of nights, restless, Koupa would walk the streets and stand by the river-bank and listen to songs borne on the waters from the lost mountains on the moon. (p.63)

In London Koupa marries a rich widow, Mrs Gayford, as he is tired of poverty despite its romantic charms. He first establishes a bond with his wife-to-be by

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[29] Praz, p.40.

recognising the work of a White Artist, one of an eccentric band who believes the use of colour in pictorial art to be tasteless. Mrs Gayford is going through a short-lived phase of giving them patronage. Koupa helps her to write an outrageous, trashy, eye-catching meditation on one of the pictures, running as follows (p.148):

> Crash on the heaving slopes of weeping night
> The lilies droop.
> Let dawn be damned; night's here in shivering
> Low
> Blow
> Wind of the fateful woods.
> A farthing? I see girls droop with powdered hair.
> And writhen lips, and old men cry in dreams.
> Hush!
> A beggar selling brooches in the mist.

The White Artists react rather nervously to such a talent in their midst, and soon the Koupa couple part company with them to found their own arts magazine, which begins with pleasing circulation figures. The husband's continual penance is to service the needs of his fat and ugly wife, the novel ending on a superbly jarring note with the unwholesome prelude, quoted in this chapter's second section, to one such servicing. If Mitchell loathes Koupa as a character and lambasts his pretentiousness, he does seem fascinated by his creation. The other made-up poem to feature in Stained Radiance is "Lost", a sonnet of Koupa's (set down in its entirety, p.97) in which God meets Christ in downtown London. It can be found in typescript in the NLS collection,[30] and bears the embarrassing marks of Mitchell's earnestness. Koupa's is one of those other lives (like that of First World War veteran) which Mitchell might have liked to live, the debauched late-romantic garret poet. The character also involves more decadent game-playing, the "slopes of weeping night" poetry approximates to symbolist poetry with its suggestiveness and calculated lack of precision in the images

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30 "Lost", NLS MS 26058, f.33.

used;[31] Koupa shares a penchant for verse of this nature, for manic religiousness, and for bohemian, dirty living with French figures such as Paul Verlaine, a bugbear of Nordau's alongside Mallarmé and Baudelaire.[32] It may be that in Koupa Mitchell is satirising characters he knew in London; it could also be simply that once again he is drawing on the nineteenth century for literary colour. But if Mitchell wants to be horrid like Koupa, he also wants to be very very good. Max Nordau's solution to all the egotism, pretension, dirt and degeneration with which his volume deals is that good Europeans should develop a "hygiene of the mind".[33] This advice is often assented to by Leslie Mitchell when in undecadent mood.

4 Hygiene

Mitchell's desire for hygiene amounts to an obsession. He may have picked it up in a most literal sense from revulsion to army conditions -- and McGrath reports Ray's picture of a man "fastidious in matters of cleanness and neatness"[34] -- but there is also a body of writing on the subject which comes to him via Wells. Havelock Ellis' Task of Social Hygiene, though, written in 1912, is perhaps the most spectacular one-volume example of the word's over-use. As Ellis surveys the rights and wrongs of, and possible improvements to, modern civilisation, he looks for hygiene not just in the sexual act or the sewage system but in international relations, modern languages and the trade union movement. The introduction declares:

> The questions of social hygiene, as here understood, go to the heart of life. [. . .] At one end, social hygiene may be regarded simply as the extension of an elementary sanitary code: at the

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31 See Charles Chadwick, Symbolism (London, 1971), pp.2-3 for a working definition of symbolist poetry.

32 Nordau, p.100-44 (section on Symbolism), and also p.285 on the evils of Baudelaire.

33 Nordau, p.559.

34 Campbell, Lewis Grassic Gibbon, p.5; McGrath, p.465.

> other end it seems to have in it the glorious freedom of a new religion.[35]

Wells follows Ellis' lead in a less systematic way, showing in a number of novels an obsession with the idea of cleanness, this obsession having been identified by Peter Kemp in H G Wells and The Culminating Ape: Biological Themes and Imaginative Obsessions:

> Opposed to this grubbiness is the ideal proposed in A Modern Utopia: "a straight and clean desire for a straight and clean fellow-creature". This hygienic state of affairs is to be found between Ann Veronica and Capes. She is "young and clean", he says, "as clean as fire", possessing "a nice clean hardness"; if he were "a clean, free man he would ask her to be his partner." [. . .] Semantic carbolic is also vigorously used in The Passionate Friends. Lady Mary's voice has a "clean strong sharpness", and, with it, she declares herself the enemy of "timid grubbiness". Her affair with Stratton is "clean and scandalous" (unlike the murky behaviour of those who "sin in the shadows").[36]

The list goes on and on. In the same way, Mitchell wants clean sex and a clean Scotland: in the essay on his land's religion he looks for the elementary application of "social hygiene" to deal with the influence of the church (ScSc, p.324) whose repression of the Scots has caused a backlash among nasty modern novelists who represent the sex act in all its "crude and insanitary details" (ScSc, p.323). "Insanitary" also refers to Cairo's worse-off quarters in The Lost Trumpet. In "Glasgow" the (good) Philistines are "clean", the (bad) Israelites "unwashed" (p.141), and the "unhygienic patois" of the Southern Irish is a very bad thing (ScSc, p.145). Mrs Gayford in Stained Radiance needs "scrubbing, mentally and physically" (p.50). In Cloud Howe Chris comments that a "mental bath" is uncommon in Segget (p.82). The same language is also used when Mitchell theorises about the rightness of the sex act in The Thirteenth Disciple.

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35 Havelock Ellis, The Task of Social Hygiene (London, 1912), p.viii.

36 Peter Kemp, H.G. Wells and the Culminating Ape: Biological Themes and Imaginative Obsessions (London, 1982), p.105.

4.1 The Representation of Sex

In that novel Malcom Maudslay is not shy of expressing opinions on the subject of how sex should be dealt with on the page:

> "I have never seen, in literature, that poor cracked mirror of life, reflections of such characters as ourselves [i.e. Malcom and lover Rita]. Are all seventeen year old boys and girls of these postwar years as our cretinaceous fictionists depict them? -- Either awkward, insanitary beings, under parental control, addicted to games and sweets and lumpish calf-loves entirely sexless, or else moribund perverts immersed in pleasures Lesbian and Gomorrhan under the able tutelage of clerical schoolmasters? Are there no frank young people who want to talk together and kiss together and sleep together?" (p.81)

The apparently disapproving "Lesbian" and "Gomorrhan", incidentally, compare with the novel's later comment that men do not risk describing themselves as "loving" each other in case "classical homosexual associations" are made (TD, p.128) although according to Michael McGrath, the real-life equivalent of Malcom's Secular Control Group in The Thirteenth Disciple, the Promethean Society (of which Mitchell was a member) advocated liberalising the laws against homosexuals.[37] But to come back to Malcom and his presentation of the affair with Rita: if they were really "frank", they might do more than "sleep together". Mitchell is well aware of the peculiarly euphemistic nature of the epithet, since Malcom as a boy wonders why the minister "sleeps with his housekeeper" when he has a "big, fine bed of his own" and quotes his own novel in the "Religion" essay in Scottish Scene (p.319). On reaching sexual awareness after some confusing experiences, Malcom not only deplores the art of his day but wishes positively to improve it, to start it properly:

> Some day he would write a novel, the world's first real love story. "I thee with my body worship." What a book, what a book one could make of it, with the essence of every love story -- the sex act -- stripped of shame and reticence! With neither the wordy pawings of the

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[37] McGrath, p.51.

> pornographer, nor the scared brutalities of the realist, nor the romantic's firelight and curtains. (p.102)

However, the narrator avoids treating the the love of Malcom and Rita in the way suggested, but draws a veil over the proceedings, sadly concluding that "we are all too young and nasty-minded" (p.103). There are, though, a number of other approximations to sex scenes elsewhere.

No explicit sex scenes as such appear in the novels. Instead we find summary, displacement, elision, and symbolism. The first of these is often employed in Sunset Song. Though it was one of the original causes of wrath in the Mearns for relative explicitness, the presentation of Chris's sex life seems unexceptionable to modern eyes. She gives this slightly irreverent forecast to a prying Mistress Munro: "Ewan and I haven't lain together. We'll wait until we're married"(p.138). At the wedding feast Long Rob sings "The lass who made the bed to me", which unnerves Ewan a touch but is appreciated by Chris and others. When it comes to the first night itself, "he took her close to him, and they were one flesh, one and together" (p.168). The words perform their required function, invoking Biblical language and naturalness. But if the sexual act need arouse no shame, hiding or nervousness, why not be more joyously explicit? Perhaps Mitchell did not relish the prospect of being banned by British censors, having experienced bans in Eire and Australia;[38] perhaps Jarrolds had a publishing policy which drew a certain line anyway. But where he wishes to give sex a stronger *frisson* than the fairly respectable summarising of Sunset Song he succeeds, metaphor being the unsurprising means. Stained Radiance has the most unmissable of these scenes: John Garland and Thea Mayven are about to make love by the Scottish sea-coast:

> All of a long hour the tide hung poised. But now, suddenly, it began to enter the bay; in long lines of surf it poured across the shingle. Crooning inarticulately, the urge of the sea and the

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38 See Malcolm, book, p.91.

> sky behind it, it flooded, and the earth, understanding, shook and murmured at its coming. And a sound of tears and a sound of laughter rose and quivered and faltered to a voiceless extasy. Never-ending was the wail of the gulls. (p.133)

There is an embarrassingly galumphing quality to this passage. Its suggestion of ejaculation and orgasm makes one wonder why Mitchell did not simply abandon his specious coyness and risk presenting the scene straight. It is an attempt in its way to invoke the rhythms of nature, but it seems naughtier than it is natural -- especially given the knowingly salacious tone that characterises much of the novel.

A comparable instance of this exists in Three Go Back, when Clair Stranlay decides to shed her remaining articles of clothing and to go naked like the Cro-Magnards:

> A fox prowling up by the side of the hill heard her laugh, and at the sound stopped and bared his teeth, brush cocked. He crept behind a tussock of grass and wormed his way into the heart of it [. . .] he bristled at the sight of what the hunter did, and waited till she was gone, and for nearly an hour later circled round a strange, grassy fluffment that was yet, he knew, no grass and intriguing, though very likely uneatable. (p.129)

As with Stained Radiance, the words here are explicit in their way: the worming of the fox into the tussock is sexually suggestive; the grass and the "fluffment" are reminiscent of Pope's multivalent lap-dogs in "The Rape of the Lock".[39]

Mitchell is at his most sexually provocative, however, in Grey Granite. This time it is not symbolism, but merely suggestion and word-association. The Reverend Charles McShilluck asks his housekeeper-cum-mistress if she wishes to hear the story of a soldier "wounded in a certain place":

> And the housekeeper, who'd heard it only a hundred times, standing and sitting and lying down, upstairs and downstairs and ben in the kitchen and once in the bathroom [. . .]. (p.122)

This narrative slice of their relationship becomes no longer an exposure of the

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[39] Alexander Pope, "The Rape of the Lock" in Poetical Works ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford, 1978), pp.88 - 109. "Rape" first published , 1712.

hypocrisy and exploitative lust of certain types of clergymen, but instead, a slice of pornography. The key pornographic word here, of course, is "once", which transforms what might otherwise be a rapid list of places possible for sex ("lying down" seems to confirm this first) into a gallery in which the mind can wander: only *once* in the bathroom then; a special occasion? In or out of the bath? More than once in the kitchen seems to be implied -- which other downstairs rooms? and so on. Were readers uncivilised healthy animals, they would not be so curious about sex in various places. Gay Hunter would probably not be pruriently curious, because she escapes to a time with different values.

4.2 Gay Hunter : Brushing with Nudity

In his propagandist's role, Mitchell is insistent that his rebellions are in pursuit of the cleaner, saner, more natural world invoked in Diffusionist myth: life as it was before the invention of agriculture, religion and state authority, as it is to be found in Three Go Back and, more importantly, in Gay Hunter. If there is one overriding image in the latter novel, it is that of the unashamed naked body, free from the petty and meaningless inhibitions of earlier times, symbolic of innocence, indicative of the absence of perversion. Mitchell does have nude scenes throughout his work including nude bathing in Stained Radiance, The Thirteenth Disciple, Grey Granite and Image and Superscription -- an entire nude colony exists in the last of these. Much of the action in Three Go Back is performed in the nude, but it is in Gay Hunter that self-consciousness on this score is the greatest. This is not from the innocent Hunters, needless to say, but always from Gay, representative of the twentieth century.

Gay frequently prompts herself with overtly sexual thoughts: when running her mind through a wandering self-description, she considers "how it would be to sleep with a man -- rather silly and fun perhaps" (p.4). She soon reflects on Major Houghton's attire: "to sling shorts or the various pieces of a bathing suit over this or that portion of your anatomy was to make those portions suspect and taboo" (p.11). In

this manner the book continues; she giggles at Houghton and Lady Jane for being "undraped" (pp.22,24) and then for having "scanty coverings". She is admittedly rather coy about the major's "shapely hips" (p.22), but the representation of physicality is more direct in her tangle with Towser the wolf. After spending a night with a rotting cadaver, she feels

> the tongue of a beast licking her face, and a hairy body crouched against hers [. . .] tangled, they scrambled out and looked at each other [. . .]. "If you won't bite me, I'd like to hug you. In fact, even if you do." The wolf submitted shyly, again licking her. (p.45)

Some readers may remain undisturbed by this. On the other hand, the scene involves a naked Gay, readily curious about sexual experience. Her encounter with the wolf is described using phrases that would be pornographic in other contexts, and should give pause for thought. This is not to suggest that Mitchell is advocating bestiality. The hunters, clearly living the ideal life, are profoundly innocent. Touching grass, touching animals, touching people: all is on a smooth continuum of untroubled physical pleasure; the ultimate in this is to be heterosexual bonding. Thus it would appear that we are also to accept Gay's relationship with the girl Liu without raising an eyebrow:

> As Gay sank down beside her, she turned round and took Gay in her arms. [. . .]
> If she were a man, she would flirt with Liu from dawn till dusk -- and do more than flirt! (p.75)

Only if she were a man, of course. Gay can raise herself from "the soft pillow of Liu's thighs" without inhibition, but a couple of pages on does show an awareness of possible misunderstandings:

> "I almost wish I were a man when I see you . . . (What a mess a remark like that would have landed one in, in my day! Rotten habits and minds we had!). . . ." (p.123)

Any twentieth-century reader is a pervert (like twentieth-century Major Houghton,

who has seen "disgusting sights"; "one of them with two women" (p.75)) unless they accept Gay's innocence. But if the Hunter society is composed of free individuals living for free simple pleasures without artificial taboos, what is wrong with lesbianism? Is Mitchell referring to it as "rotten", or merely to the perspectives on it in his own contemporary society? This Golden-Age freedom twenty thousand years hence seems to have exception clauses: when Gay leaves Rem for "urgent and personal reasons" and tells him not to follow, he understands, as the "elementary decencies still survived" (p.58). D.H. Lawrence's gamekeepers are less coy than Rem about such matters.[40]

Apart from the occasional, unspectacular pidgin utterance, the Hunters' ideas and perceptions are constantly mediated to us through Gay. They themselves live a pure, unmediated life, in which we cannot share at all. Gay's own thoughts are full of awareness of non-innocent states, of a "pornographic novelist's" point of view (p.62), of "scrubby little clerks" watching a striptease show (p.72) and more generally the "cloacal fancyings of men" (p.92 -- note again the rhetoric of cleanliness). The intended moral here is that there has been a falling-off from our ideal state as is evident in the hunters' lives, but we know so little about it that it is impossible to judge the issue. The pervasiveness of nudity in the book makes it unsurprising that, for, Edwin Morgan Gay Hunter contains "strange quasi-fascist resonances from the German cult of the nude body" (p.vii). Mitchell would have reacted fiercely to such assertions, perhaps asking why the devil should have all the good bodies, but the majority of his readership would be unlikely to suspend all "dirty thoughts" -- just as it is rather difficult to obey D.H. Lawrence's injunctions throughout his work to suspend self-conscious thinking and simply enjoy.[41] Mitchell's presentation of sex constantly

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[40] See D.H. Lawrence, Lady Chatterley's Lover , p.232: "If tha shits an' if tha pisses, I'm glad".

[41] See Birkin's injunctions to Hermione in D.H. Lawrence, Women in Love (Harmondsworth, 1987), p.45. First published in U.K., 1921; in U.S., 1920.

suffers from this gap between real and ideal. It is not clear whether we are to be as unrepressed as are the hunters. We are certainly urged to be less inhibited than twentieth century norms permit. But are there limits?

4.3 Necessary Repressions

Sunset Song and Cloud Howe repeatedly present sexual repression that has warping effects. The main serious purpose of the relentless tales of rural vice found in the Quair's first two books and The Speak of the Mearns is to establish that if the sexual instinct is repressed in the traditional Calvinist manner, such vicious and twisted urges are bound to result. The clearest and most quoted example of this is the lust of John Guthrie for Chris during his last days of life, when he wishes her to come to him "as they did in Old Testament times" (SS p.108). Violence and vice is not merely a Rabelaisian/Joycean slice of all-too-human-life, but sad consequences of sad conditions. The problem with the repression argument, however, is that a sequence of three incidents in Chris's development makes out a powerful case *for* repression. She and Will sleep together before he, at least, has fully-developed secondary sexual characteristics. She is puzzled at Will fearing father's wrath over the affair. They do this again after Will has received a thrashing at the age of nearly seventeen, when "skin and hair and body" "seemed stranger" (p.42). A element of incestuous interest is suggested by this and by the passing of her hands over his torn flesh. But it would be advisable for many reasons for both of them to repress any incestuous desires. The memory of bedding with Will touches off that of being kissed by Meg Strachan, "tingling and strange and shameful by turns" (p.46). Chris presumably represses the desire she feels here, as nothing more comes of it: as we have seen in Gay Hunter ("rotten habits and minds we had") lesbian relationships seem to disgust Mitchell. Chris also has to repress desire for the "tink" in the barn (p.69). The overtly-expressed idea of repression as in any sense good, however, is not one that we often come across in Mitchell's fiction; chapter six examines his dallying with a particular

kind of dour, individualistic repression, but this is exceptional. Even though his writing represses details of this or that sexual act, it may be charitably seen as continually trying to bring ideas and facts to light with brutal honesty. Mitchell's quasi-pornographic sex and violence scenes, however, need more discussion.

5 Writing about Sex and Violence: More on Motivation

Mitchell writes "horrible books", if the Scottish farmer's wife who gives Chris Colquohoun free milk and speaks of her literary son living in London can be trusted (CH, p.173). He has a tendencies to offend deliberately, as we have seen, with the portrayal of violence and decadene in his writing. His interest in portraying different kinds of violence is, though, vigorously defended on a serious level in his letter to Helen Cruickshank:

> I am so horrified by all our dirty little cruelties and bestialities that I would feel the lowest type of skunk if I don't shout them from the house-tops. Of course I shout too loudly. But the conspiracy of silence there was in the past![42]

Here, echoing various passages in his fictional work (Gay Hunter, p.98 on the history of rape; Image and Superscription, p.93 on man's bestiality), Mitchell explains his frequent portrayal of torture and pain as conscientiously realist. Evidence to bear out his claim is not hard to come by: the power relations in the novels between perpetrators of outrage and their victims are always defined. Existing power relations, he believes, are responsible in the first instance for warping mankind into violence and perversion: the link is made at the beginning of Spartacus, as Kleon ponders the dual evils of "men slaves to lust and men slaves to men" (p.3). Throughout the novels, the examples of random cruelty between strangers, as in various classes of blood-and-guts thrillers are decidedly fewer than the cases involving master and slave, as in the

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[42] Mitchell, letter to Helen Cruickshank, 18 Nov 1933, NLS MS 26109.

crucifixions of Spartacus, or state against dissident, as in the police-cell beatings of Grey Granite. Slave and dissident will commit violence in their turn, but in a context of unbearable provocation from those above them. If there is a group that does not often retaliate, it is women, often exploited and abused by Mitchell's men.

Not satisfied by the realism argument, Douglas Young points out that Mitchell read Foxe's Book of Martyrs in his early teens, and guesses that reading such a massive record of irrational cruelty at an impressionable age had a lasting effect on his published work.[43] Herbert Read and Hugh MacDiarmid believe, on the evidence of Spartacus, that Mitchell himself had sadistic traits. For Read the book "is full of violence which is pathological and not imaginative in origin" and for MacDiarmid it "describes tortures and scenes of unbridled lust and cruelty with tell-tale gusto".[44] Tempting though it is to judge inner character from the writing, such attempts may be foolhardy. To move from sadism to fetishism, Mitchell's interest in women's underwear is an interesting case of something which could be interpretated either as a perversion or as a response to commercial pressures.

In Sunset Song on a hot day Chris takes off her boots and stockings and rolls her knickers "far up her white legs" to trample on some blankets. The next time around she takes off her skirt and petticoat, incurring the confused, lustful wrath of her father (pp.59-60). On her wedding morning she looks at her vest, knickers and petticoat which are all of a shade,

> blue, with white ribbon: and they looked lovely, and they smelt fine, and she buried her face in them, so lovely they were and the queer feeling they brought her. (pp.147-48)

A Fife Herald reviewer, quoted with glee in Scottish Scene, comments with

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[43] Young, thesis, p.18.

[44] Herbert Read, review of Spartacus, in The Spectator, October 19 1933, p.498; Hugh MacDiarmid, "Lewis Grassic Gibbon", in The Uncanny Scot (London, 1968), ed. Kenneth Buthlay, p.162.

malicious suggestiveness on Sunset Song:

> It is a story of crofter life near Stonehaven; but it is questionable if the author, or authoress, is correct in the description of crofter girls' underclothing of that period. (p.208)

If the reviewer is hinting at underwear fetishism here, a couple of extracts elsewhere might bear such a case out. The unpublished novel set in Egypt sees a Russian émigré visit a prostitute:

> Saliaeff looked at the harlot with a heavy satisfaction. She was a native who, but for the colour of her eyes, looked like a Neapolitan. Her skin was dusky gold, her hair brown and scented, and her bust full. The face she lifted up to the émigré had painted lips and eyebrows. She wore no outer dress, but only underclothes which had the sheen of imitation silk. These latter were faintly and satisfyingly soiled.[45]

In Stained Radiance, Thea Mayven thinks about her underwear. She has a "thin vest, of a sweat-inducing fabric", "stockings of artificial silk", "cotton knickers" and "stays";

> All her undergarments were new. They embraced her caressingly; she heard the pleasant underscuff of them wherever she moved. (p.108)

Max Nordau, scourge of decadence, would probably have reached a verdict on Mitchell similar to that he arrives at on Zola:

> The sight of women's linen produces a peculiar excitation in him, and he can never speak without betraying [. . .] that representations of this kind are voluptuously accentuated in him. This effect of female linen in degenerates affected by sexual psychopathy is well-known in mental therapeutics, and has often been described by Krafft-Ebbing, Lombroso, and others.[46]

Back to Stained Radiance, though, for an alternative view. Garland ponders on how

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[45] Mitchell, unpublished novel set in Egypt, MS 26057, pp.83-84.

[46] Nordau, p.500.

to satisfy a fickle public:

> And why does this earnest world want your purple patches, then? Because it's so made, because it's human and inconsistent, and likes an occasional distraction -- lewdness and lingerie. It likes to scratch and snigger and guffaw subduedly in the interval of knitting its brows. (p.88)

One may not want to take Mitchell/ Garland at his word; perhaps the inclusion of the lewd and unpleasant in Mitchell's work is evidence of some pathological problem. This is speculation, though, and what is presented often shows Mitchell is aware of what he is doing. Mitchell's keen awareness of exploitable popular tastes also shows itself with the Duncairn workers in Grey Granite. Even those who have been Reds in their time are highly partial to "the story of a lassie raped, bairned, killed and fried up in chips. Ay, fairly educative, the Scottish newspapers" (p.133). This sort of information is much appreciated by the London newsreading public in Stained Radiance, where "a newsboy cried in the gutter of the discovery of a woman's head in an ashbin and the search for the murderer" (SR, p.25). One could think too of Cloud Howe's church absentees who on Sundays "read about all the divorces the English had from their wives -- damn't, man! they fair had a time, those English tinks!" (CH, p.15) Panderings to public taste in the same way would have come easily to Mitchell, a former pressman himself.

As we have seen, his stories set in the Middle East have interesting elements in them, but too many use the device of pulling the reader into a tale initially by brash praise of the wares to come -- a transcendent revelation, for example, or an earth-shattering manuscript -- and then falling flat due to laziness or hurry, as if Mitchell wanted to get on with the next one. "The Epic", "It is Written", "Cartaphilus", "The Lost Constituent" and the novel Lost Trumpet might be cited here. Even more glaringly, the stories included in Masterpiece of Thrills, a 1936 Daily Express anthology, are told for instant and momentary sensations of shock, fright or distaste. The list of illustrations is a fair representation of what is to follow:

> "I was out of that room in one leap"
> "'Put 'em up', said a shape, aggrievedly." [from Mitchell's "Busman's Holiday"]
> "The hag fell on her knees before the image of Kali"
> "It was the mortuary"[47]

Mitchell's most impressive paragraph is to be found in "The first and last woman". The "things" are giant snails which are about to eat the earth's last woman and the narrator:

> Through the trees I became aware that the forest was teeming with horrible crawling things each twice the size of a camel. From the rocky plain on the other side, other ghoulish abominations crawled in towards us. There was no escape.[48]

Enough said. Admittedly, Mitchell did not ask for stories such as these to be published, but they were given by his wife to John Gawsworth in response to a request for more material; presumably, though, they were written with some sort of popular sensationalist market in mind.

Not all Mitchell's material depicting the human beast, then, is written with absolute straightfaced sincerity. Awareness of commercial considerations has to inform one's understanding of this kind of element in Mitchells work. Yet he does seem to believe quite genuinely that the human race is self-destructive and in danger of destroying itself without needing the help of giant snails or their kind. Crudely sensational as they are, incidentally, the "last woman" and "ghoulish abominations" relate up to a large number of his speculations about the biological future: what are and were little boys and girls made of, and will this be the same for ever?

6 Science Fiction and Fantasy

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47 John Gawsworth (ed.), Masterpiece of Thrills (London, 1936), p.11.

48 Masterpiece of Thrills, p.735.

6.1 Evolution

If evolution's claim to being scientific fact is problematic because it is not an experiment we can repeat, it is at least powerful hypothesis: a convincing and well-performed act of historical reconstruction, as Wells points out in First and Last Things.[49] Mitchell takes the Darwinian hypothesis and plays with variations on it, several of them involving fantasy. To make the Neanderthals evil and violent and the Cro-Magnards good and peaceful in Three Go Back, for example, is a fantasy, even though it is true that the Cro-Magnards came after the former in history. Something between fact and fantasy occurs when Mitchell reflects on races succeeding one another, the basic idea of species destruction and succession being fine; the ordered purpose behind what goes on being a matter for debate. The tone and sentiment of the following passage recalls Tennyson's words in In Memoriam about Nature being not only "careless of the single life" but of the whole type as well: "all must go".[50] Thus Mitchell:

> One by one God murdered and discarded them. For they bored him. Heidelberg man with the mighty skull, the ape-hunter of Piltdown, the chattering beasts of Broken Hill and the Java jungles -- they passed and were not, bloody foam and spume on a sea that whispered cruelty and change. (TGB, p.191)

The thoughts are similar in the short story "The Last Ogre" in which a thirteenth century Middle Eastern maiden goes riding, gets lost, and is found by a quasi-Yeti, one of "a race of demons, forgotten by God, abandoned by nature [. . .] discarded in God's vast purposes", "the inhuman monster who left his bones and fire-sites and clumsy weapons in Spy and Gibraltar" (PDEN, pp.108,109). He is promptly shot dead by the girl's well-meaning rescue party, bringing an expression of pity from the

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[49] Wells, First and Last Things (London, 1929), p.29. See note 55 on edition used.

[50] Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "In Memoriam", in In Memoriam and Other Poems, ed. John Jump (London, 1986), pp.75-153 (104). IM first published 1850.

tale's narrator. Mitchell is reserved about progress, and Darwin and Huxley were more cautious about evolution's inevitably progressive and sunny nature than some have caricatured them to be,[51] but Mitchell is always more so than them, being capable of quirky remarks (inspired by whom? Joyce?) such as the following:

> After five hundred thousand years in the upright position, the pelvis of the human female is still incapable of supporting, without aids, the weight of the entrails and the womb, even of a virgin. (SR, p.108)

Stained Radiance is full of biological instruction and comment, as seen in Koupa's already-quoted interest in teeming sperm and teeming birth, or with Garland suggesting that humans will evolve into a mere combination of "skull and feelers" . Further still imaginatively, Koupa takes us beyond life itself:

> And all London was strangely silent. The end of the world might be come, life dead and frozen and forgotten, a twittering ended and foregone beneath the iceglow of the stars. So it would end, some time. (SR, p.287)

The debt to Wells is again obvious; one recalls primarily the Time Machine and the traveller's journey to a time where human life is extinct, only crabs and lichens remaining. Other biological fantasies or speculations running through Mitchell's work may derive from elsewhere in the Wells oeuvre.

6.2 Precedents

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[51] See Adrian Desmond and James Moore, Darwin (Harmondsworth, 1992): p.232 for Darwin's suggestion that bees are just as evolved in their own way as we are; p.433 for Huxley's suggestion (contradicting other beliefs held by Darwin) that no species at any given moment is truly more developed than any of its contemporaries.

The Time Machine is Wells's longest, bleakest look into the future. Humanity has split into Eloi and Morlocks, the Eloi being the small, weak, childlike descendants of the upper and middle classes and the Morlocks being the progeny of the proletariat. Human development through evolution presumably reached a certain peak, but then went into regression. Elsewhere, Wells imagines humans themselves, rather than impersonal forces, adjusting their own biology. The twist in The Island of Dr Moreau is that animals are being turned into semi-humans, thus questioning our divinely given uniqueness.[52] The Food of the Gods sees giants being created from ordinary people by Boomfood, the wildly improbable invention of some Kentish scientists. More cerebrally and less spectacularly, The Invisible Man imagines the transformation of all human tissue so that it neither reflects or refracts light, except to the extent that normal air does.[53] Humans can change, as can moon-people; The First Men in the Moon involves a society whose citizens, if the word is not a misnomer, are only biologically capable of what their work requires them to do; a concentration of hands, legs or heads applies in each case according to planned need.

Mitchell also shows familiarity with Shaw's Back to Methusaleh, with its infinitely aged population, and Huxley's Brave New World, with its attempted elimination of all love and anguish in an antiseptic, totally planned system.[54] His reaction to all these speculations about human biological change is one of dismissal. He understandably thinks it perverse for the Romans in Spartacus to experiment on the bodies of slaves (p.125); he thinks it perverse of nature to experiment overmuch or, for that matter, writers to speculate overmuch on such matters. Wells is challenged over his view of the human mind and body in The Conquest of the Maya, because his credo First and Last Things suggests that Herbert George Wells is very different from Dartmoor

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[52] Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau (London, 1896).

[53] Wells, The Invisible Man (London, 1897).

[54] George Bernard Shaw, Back to Methuselah (London, 1921);
Aldous Huxley, Brave New World (London, 1932).

convicts because of their "hardened fibre" and "vigorous sensations" -- of which he has only pale imitations -- while Wells has greater intellectual ability.[55] In The Conquest of the Maya, Mitchell caricatures such a belief, calls it "this shallowest of all forms of reasoning" (p.148) and goes on to picture a day-in-the-life of Mayan society with winking soldiers, giggling girls, and ordinary people mildly fascinated by victims of human sacrifice being skinned alive first. We are all the same -- at least for a few pages until Mitchell admits that the sacrificers' mental life is "as remote from modern concept as the mental life of the dinosaur" (p.190). There is the same ambivalence elsewhere in his work -- simply left hanging -- between the present-day occupants of Govan in "Glasgow" being "very like you and me" and yet "sub-human as definitely as the Morlocks of Wells." (ScSc, p.136).

6.3 Denials and Affirmations

Mitchell also puts forward his views about human oneness and continuity again in Gay Hunter. When Gay realises that she has travelled in time, she wonders how far she has come, and what the differences will be, remembering

> books of the early Wells [. . .] that pictured the sciences mounting and growing, piling great crystalline pyramids of knowledge and technique into alien skies, with men their servitors, changing and altering with them, physically and psychically, mislaying legs and intestinal tubes, sprouting many arms, becoming bisexual [. . .]. She thought of the fantastic beings of a play, Back To Methusaleh [. . .] who were bred to long lives of thousands of years and spent them in meditation on the Oneness of Life! What a eunuch's dream! Or the younger Huxley, with a machine-made world and machine-made humans, undergoing a fantastic existence conditioned of the bleak lunacy of their author's anthropological beliefs . . . (pp.31-32)

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[55] Wells, First and Last Things (London, 1929), p.83. This was originally published in 1908, but Mitchell cites the 1929 edition (CoM, p.272) which will be used for all references.

That takes care of science-fiction of such a nature, then. Profound change to the human psyche and body, is perverse, unclean, or simply not going to happen. If MacDiarmid's Drunk Man thinks that " . . . organs may develop syne/ Responsive to the need divine/ O' single-minded humankin'", he is wrong.[56] Twenty thousand years on, the Hunters are just as man should be, and was in twenty thousand B.C.

Yet Mitchell is always prepared momentarily to consider humanity as warped, as a biological freak. The novelist Quaritch in The Lost Trumpet tells this parable about what he thinks we are, tiny worm-like parasites on the liver, who remain happy and content with their existences until

> a breath of poisonous gas sweeps down on our colony of worms, and they sway and gasp and vomit into a shocking awareness of the fact that theories on which they've been fed are nonsensical. They abide in a sty, a charnel-house. No great super-fluke awaits them in the beyond, across the dark blood-streams, in a place of meaty layers of ordure. (p.197)

The poisonous gas in the analogy is World War One: that was the first big whiff, and more gas is to follow; we are about to be destroyed, and are not worth saving, and there is no way out. Colonel Saloney listens to the vision, argues against it and is later vindicated when Quaritch reveals his maladjusted past and after the magical blowing of the ancient trumpet decides to put his life on a more positive course. The liver-fluke vision is nothing to worry about; it was the product of a diseased mind.

Diseased too is John Garland's mind as he paces round London in Stained Radiance, convinced that his wife and child are going to die. His vision also is correspondingly dismissive of any positive in human life. There is a God, but it is a diabolical one, who stands, finger poised, in the laboratory of human destinies:

> Where he had flicked a finger the crabs of writhing cancer would move in agonised stomachs, great tumours would root and sprout in rotting brain-cells, viviparous organs would contract and close on unborn offspring. Then God would replace the lid, make notes, walk away, and

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[56] Hugh MacDiarmid, "A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle" in Complete Poems, p.163.

> stand watching . . . and God was but a fleeting drift of atoms in an experiment by yet another super-scientist . . . (p.265)

Soon he realises that this is "rot" and stops thinking it. The novel, though, is a factory of fantastic ideas about life on macro- and micro- levels of existence. Garland thinks up, Thea thinks down, imagining each grain of sand to contain a universe. She plays with the sand:

> Trickling the worlds through her fingers, she caused planetary collisions, the extinguishment of suns, the wiping out of whole races. Black, red, and storm-streaked grew the heavens, whenceneath countless tribes looked up at the approach of doom. (SR, p.130)

She then leaves it. The idea is finished with. Gay Hunter attacks not only human biological change but complex ideas in astrophysics. The attacks are ultimately about the same thing: the universe should be like the human body, comfortable to be with and not subject to great change -- despite change being the motto of Wells's William Clissold and the repeated motif of the Quair. The subjective reality for Gay in her English paradise that Mitchell tries to make objective challenges on the idea of change: "Here, in this evening quiet, you could sit and doubt even the existence of change" and one can dismiss everything the astrophysicists say, especially when they talk of

> a varying fantasy of catastrophic universes -- contracting universes, expanding universes, universes that frittered away into nothingness, universes that coiled in upon themselves like -- like rattlesnakes with colic. (GH, p.143)

Universes should not have strange bodies; nor should we. Yet with all this assertion that we should interact with simple human reality and not worry about the fantastic, Mitchell still wants to travel through time and remain unfettered by probability or logic. Gay Hunter and Three Go Back are not isolated; Malcom in The Thirteenth Disciple suggests that while an infant he "caught a glimpse through the time-spirals of some Leekan witch-doctor". "The Land" invokes time-spirals as well, connecting up hunters seven thousand years ago with today: the Quair and The Speak of the Mearns

see ghosts at intervals. Gay Hunter finds out from her lover Rem that "there are many songs" (p.184 and passim), meaning that there are parallel mini-universes of some kind, that there are infinite horizons and possibilities for the events that will happen to her; this phrase in similar to one in "The Floods of Spring", from Mitchell's Persian Dawns, Egyptian Nights, in which the proto-anarchist layabouts Zeia and Romi declare when confronted with the need for work that "[t]here are other dreams", i.e. there are other possibilities, at present only imagined, of how a society may function. This line in its turn comes from Wells's fantasy The Sea Lady, where there are "other dreams" beyond what humans know, though if you follow them you might end up drowning.[57] Sometimes Mitchell wants to drown in strange ideas, but he generally runs back from the water's edge.

Conclusion

Mitchell shows a decided ambivalence about human sex, violence, and biology. He imagines worlds and people profoundly different and then dismisses them as whimsical nonsense. He immerses himself in decadence and then protests his commitment to sanitation and hygiene. His commitment to uninhibited, innocent sensual abandon is at odds with his implied disapproval of male and female homosexuality in Gay Hunter and The Thirteenth Disciple. His apparent confusion about sexuality forms part of the dilemma seen in his denunciation of the rabid human beast versus the plea for the goodness of basic animal nature.

The ambivalences may be seen in relation to Marxist ideas in the thirties. The doctrine of social realism was championed in its crudest form by Karl Radek, who spoke in favour of the straightforward, the honest, and the wholesome, and spoke against bourgeois avant-garde experimentation. He was opposed in this by writers such as David Gascoyne, who believed the use of experimental or progressive

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[57] Wells, The Sea Lady (London, 1902).

literature to constitute a laudable shock-tactic involving criticism of the normative and of empirical reality.[58] Stained Radiance and The Lost Trumpet are the high points of what there is of his decadence; it was a road not really taken, more wandered onto now and again. The Quair is strongly socialist realist in a way, though informed and spiced for better or worse by a perverser Mitchell side.

The untidiness of Mitchell's shuffling between the clean and the unclean necessarily reflects what he wants to see as the untidiness of the processes of birth, sex, and "Life" in general, a word he frequently invokes in the Quair.[59] Any quasi-Leavisite statement on Mitchell's reverence before Life, though, has to be qualified in two important ways. One has to mention first of all the concentration on Death in his work -- highlighted by William Malcolm[60] -- and secondly, the importance in Mitchell's work of bleakly individual, even individualistic stances, detached, if not from all Life, from the masses, from the ordinary, from the sums and conglomerations of other people's lives. This crucial second point will be examined in the next chapter.

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[58] See Karl Radek's 1934 speech to the Soviet Writers' Congress in Cunningham, pp.299-300 and David Gascoyne, A Short Survey of Surrealism (London, 1970), pp.117-24; first published 1935. A more ambitious, developed and controversial version of Gascoyne's ideas may be found in Catherine Belsey, Critical Practice (London, 1980).

[59] For "Life" see CH, p.200; GG, pp.111,163,183.

[60] Malcolm, thesis, pp.492-98.

Chapter 6: Beyond Culture

Introduction

In most of Mitchell's fiction the contrast between the mass and individual is a strong one; a variety of heroes, even proletarian or ur-proletarian ones such as Ewan or Spartacus, find differences between themselves and the followers whose wishes they are supposed to embody. Exceptions to this of a kind exist in the utopian science fiction of Three Go Back and Gay Hunter, where the individual's autonomy to roam apart wherever s/he wants does not seem to conflict with the corporate demands of the hunter-gatherer society. Certain issues are ignored (such as detailed representations of precisely how the tribe live together) to achieve this end.

Mankind's Fall into civilisation (according to Mitchell) parallels mankind's Fall into the separatedness of individualities (according to Fredric Jameson). William Dowling explicates Jameson thus: there was originally no conception of the private individual. Each person considered himself only part of the group, although "group" would not be conceptualised as such. In this state one enjoyed pleasures and sensations in a way incomprehensible to present civilisation; art ever since has been an attempt to make up for this. The individual, having formed, found itself alienated not merely from society but from itself. Lacan's emphasis on the feeling of lack experienced by a child when it perceives itself as different from its mother and from the rest of the world should be understood in Marxist terms:

> Marxism already knew all of this, for the story of history for Marxism, and especially Jameson's Marxism, is the story of a fall out of collective life and consciousness into a world of estrangement and separation and alienation.[1]

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[1] William Dowling, Marx, Althusser, Jameson: A Guide to the Political Unconscious (London, 1984), p.92. See also Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious (London, 1981), p.62, which argues that "the structure of the psyche is historical".

Gay Hunter presents the sort of profound tribal pre-Civilisation wholeness that Jameson believes in, albeit expressed in cruder and anti-psychoanalytical form: Gay's hunter companion Rem, not alienated from himself or others, has eyes that are

> deep golden pools where shadows and strange images moved and changed and took fresh being -- endlessly, unceasingly, not as the thought-images of the men she had known, confused and mixed and broken, but with the assurance and sweep of the clouds in the sky. (p.94)

> [Rem and his friends] dreamt seldom or never. They were without inhibitions or complexes or all of the rest of the sad, futile fantasies civilisation and Sigmund Freud had once foisted on men. They did not dream of life -- they lived it and sang it instead. (p.179)

In Mitchell's world outside the scientific romances, however, wholeness does not reign universally; individual and society will always be in unresolvable conflict. Having looked in the previous five chapters at races, groups, and civilisations, I will now argue that a substantial amount of Mitchell's work tends against close identification with any ethic of race or group loyalty (even, or especially, where the human race as a whole is involved) but instead, for reasons partly to do with the biographical facts of Mitchell's own life and with the literary precedent of a particular kind of individualism in the fiction of Wells, resembles what the Hard Left of the thirties would have described as "bourgeois individualism".

1 Ones of a Kind

One kind of Marxist orthodoxy about the relation of the individual and the masses is caricatured in Stained Radiance in the form of the humourless, ice-blooded secretary of the Anarcho-Communist Party, James Storman. Storman has little in common with middle-class would-be radicals who believe in "Individual Liberty" (p.8); his opinions

on pity and concern for others are these:

> He cared only that in the state he wrought to build men would rise from their beds for work that had selflessness and purpose; would procreate children who would also serve that unending aim [. . .]. With whom the milleniards would share their beds and brothels, tears and tribulations, was no concern of his. He had little or no interest in human beings, recognising, as he did, that man is an abstraction. (SR, p.67)

He sees his girlfriend Norah, furthermore, as an unimportant idiot who may one day demonstrate some usefulness by breeding children for the revolution. During the course of the novel, though, a slow process of change takes place. Storman becomes a father, marries, develops a kind of affection for his wife and learns that living life with his former philosophical premises is impossible. He goes into philosophical retreat, leaving the Anarcho-Communists and writing a letter to the Party justifying his position in these terms:

> I can no longer believe in the saving of the world through the sinking of individuality in a common cause. Mob salvation is a proven lie. I can no longer believe that the common good is greater than the good of the individual. There is no common good. (p. 268)

Mitchell is not expressing his own views through a surrogate here. Storman's eventual individualistic quietism and rejection of the common good is to be seen as the polar opposite of his early, equally unacceptable rejection of the category "man". The initial rejection of humanism seems to cover two points: first, any idea of the human individual is false; second, people are not profoundly like each other and have no essential human core. The rendering of these ideas of Storman shows Mitchell's familiarity with brands of extreme Communist philosophy. Marx himself is well-known for deploring the rise of the autonomous individual in the shape of the individual member of the bourgeoisie: his belief about the "Robinson Crusoe-type stories" of the seventeenth century and after is that they anticipate the "civil society" of

free market economics: "in this society of free competition, the individual appears free from the bonds of nature", whereas in reality for Marx all activity is social activity, all production social production.[2] The false "civil society" conception is one from which free-market economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo have profited greatly; individual autonomy and cut-throat capitalist competition are bound inextricably together.

Marx goes further, though. Of his modern interpreters, Louis Althusser has been most insistent on this, dividing Marx into two periods and claiming that in 1845 Marx left his naïve years behind and "broke radically with every theory that based history and politics on an essence of man" in his sixth thesis on Feuerbach where, criticising the latter's ideas about the universality of the religious impulse -- every human, according to Feuerbach, being essentially religious -- Marx writes that "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality it is the ensemble of the social relations".[3] While Althusser qualifies his own stance by allowing the "necessity for humanism as an *ideology*" for Marxism to "base a policy in relation to the existing ideological forms" i.e. for practical campaigning in the world outside the academy,[4] opponents' accounts claim that Althusser's use of Marx boils down to the dissolution of individuals "into their class and social relations".[5] One such opponent unhappy about such anti-humanism, Victor Seidler contends:

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[2] Marx, "Introduction to the Grundrisse" in A Karl Marx Reader pp.3-20 (3-4). Introduction first published 1903.

[3] Louis Althusser, For Marx, translated by Ben Brewster (London, 1969), p.227. First published 1965. He refers to Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach", in A Karl Marx Reader, p.20-23 (22).

[4] Althusser, p.231.

[5] See Victor Jeleniewski Seidler, "Trusting Ourselves: Marxism, Human Needs and Sexual Politics", in Simon Clarke (ed.), One-Dimensional Marxism: Althusser and the Politics of Culture (London, 1980) pp.103-156 (135).

> Even if we accept in some form the critique of "human nature" [. . .] we also want to give some expression to a sense of shared human equality. This isn't easy to articulate.

Seidler believes that Marx, who sees "human activity itself as objective activity", would be on his side.[6] In the essay as a whole he accepts the limitations of thinking about individuals as such, given the social and political questions which transcend this concept, but nevertheless attacks any theory that leaves individual experience out of account. While exploited workers *should* think about themselves in terms of their class, to ignore what they feel as individuals is a counterproductive and unrealistic repression.

In Mitchell's Stained Radiance, Storman's replacement as Anarcho-Communist secretary, John Garland, adopts an outlook involving a humanist type of socialism, where causes of mass interest are to be fought for due to the spur of direct experience of personal hardship, that of himself and his wife. He originally joins the army because of poverty, is then posted with them to Palestine, and is ultimately forced to rid himself of two fingers in a contrived rifle accident in order to be invalided back home to rejoin his desperately poor and pregnant wife, cast out of one set of lodgings for entertaining a Communist there. At the conclusion, Garland declares:

> Perhaps, somehow, I'll help a little to clean and fumigate the rat-run. No individual can, but some brotherhood of the shamed and tortured may do it yet [. . .] unless that's a dreary illusion as well. (p.283)

While steering clear of mere individualism, then, Garland makes it clear in his slogan-ridden speech involving a "brotherhood of the shamed and tortured" (not something that could have been said by Storman in his former incarnation) that he

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6 Seidler, p.118.

believes in human beings as more than abstractions and believes in a common human currency.

In Grey Granite Ewan believes, at least in the early stages, that we and people of past ages are in "blood, bone, thought the same" (p.43). This looks like part of the powerful strand of humanism that runs through Mitchell, as seen in the essentialism of his outlook in The Conquest of the Maya (see last chapter). However, what this human identification turns out to mean for Ewan and his friend Jim Trease as the book progresses is that the individual is nothing:

> Jim Trease said plain that of course the Communists would exploit the case to the full -- for their own ends, not for Ewan's. They'd do all they could for him, but Ewan was nothing to them, just as he, Jim Trease, was nothing. (p.140)

> Most likely such leaders of the workers as themselves would be flung aside or trampled under, it didn't matter [. . .] they'd no more protest than a man's fingers complain of a foolish muscle. (p.181)

When Ewan of all people expresses this kind of humility, it should be be taken with a pinch of salt. It is, though, the constant way he theorises. Mitchell is using the imagery that will be taken up by Orwell's O'Brien, who challenges Winston Smith's view of the latter's impending judicial murder:

> Do you not understand, Winston, that the individual is only a cell? The weariness of the cell is the vigour of an organism. Do you die when you cut your fingernails? [7]

The general implication of Grey Granite seems to be that while admiring Ewan's radical Leftist forthrightness, Mitchell has profound problems with Ewan's attitude, given his spoken rejection of Ellen and unspoken rejection of his mother; the emotional

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[7] Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, p.270.

lives of these two women form an important part of the novel and cannot be negated. When he feels like it in the Quair or Stained Radiance, Mitchell pleads for substantially more common, human decency than Ewan shows.

If Ewan's thoughts about himself as the finger of the Communistic body (of Marx?) prefigures Orwell, it echoes Galton and Wells. The former, famous founder of eugenics and tireless advocate of improving the race all round by controlled breeding, says (despite all the entrenched elitism) in his memoirs, "Individuals appear to me as partial detachments from the infinite ocean of being".[8] Wells believes the same thing about racial fluidity and individual life as illusion at at least one point in First and Last Things:

> The race flows through us, the race is the drama and we are the incidents [. . .]. In so far as we are individuals, in so far as we merely seek to follow merely individual ends, we are accidental, disconnected, without significance, the sport of chance . . . we are episodes in an experience greater than ourselves.[9]

He can, though, change his tune between the same pair of covers.While believing in the individual as mere bubble in the blood of the race, he also sweeps impressively through a number of the sciences: he recounts Darwin's contribution to biology in terms of its demonstration of the failure of Linnaean rigid classifications, or taxonomies, because boundaries between species are never really stable, and then goes

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[8] Galton, p.322.

[9] Wells, First and Last Things , p.65. See also His D. Sc. thesis, published in 42-44: A Contemporary Memoir upon Human Behaviour during the Crisis of the World Revolution (London, 1944), on The Quality of Illusion in the Higher Metazoa, which goes against simple individualism along similar lines with more close-knit argument, exploring the ways in which our bodies are collections of organisms as much as anything else: we may be perceived not just in terms of body-derived individuality but also in terms (at one level) of our separate organs or (at another) of our collective social existence.

on to assert that with Darwin "The hard and fast classificatory system broke down and individuality came into its own". Furthermore:

> Counting, measurement, the whole fabric of mathematics is subjective and untrue to the world of fact, and the uniqueness of individuals is the objective truth. [. . .] Could you take men by the thousand billion, you could generalise about them as you do about atoms; could you take the atoms singly, it may be you would find them as individual as your aunts and cousins. (pp.27-29)

John Carey looks at Wells's mini-hero Arthur Kipps wondering and not being sure if "there was ever a chap quite like me?", picks up on the contradiction or ambivalence between Wells's standpoints, and makes it a saving grace.[10] Stated ambivalences aside, though, the overriding logic of what happens to characters in Wells's novels is that -- paradigmatically for Mitchell -- he believes strongly in the ability of the individual will to forge a path that is all of its own.

2 H.G. Wells Going Beyond Culture

The term "beyond culture", in all its richness and vagueness, is borrowed from William Bellamy's study referred to below. In it he makes his own attempt to defend the fiction of the much-maligned trio, by demonstrating a "line of continuity" in the English novel between Victorians and Moderns, "arguing that the release and consolidation of the self has depended on a gradually developing ability to confront the post-Darwinian crisis of consciousness", this crisis consisting of people's realisation that they are sophisticated animals rather than divinely created special beings.[11]

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[10] Wells, Kipps: The Story of a Simple Soul (London, 1904), p.425;
Carey, p.147.

[11] William Bellamy, The Novels of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy 1890-1910 (London, 1971), p.2. Page references follow in the text.

Bellamy uses Cooley, Angell and Carr's Introductory Sociology for his definition of culture: it is

> the entire accumulation of artificial objects, tools, techniques, ideas, symbols, and behaviour-patterns peculiar to a group of people, possessing a certain consistency of its own, and capable of transmission from one generation to another. Culture, in other words, is the sum total of the transmittable results of living together. (p.4)

He explains that he has used the term in this sense rather than the "Arnoldian" one of "high culture". The terms are, of course intimately related in that "high culture" is a major part of the transmittable results of living together; Wells, moreover, shows himself profoundly interested in such a relation. It is, however, important for Bellamy to emphasise the sociological aspect of the term when defining his programme with regard to the three novelists. Discussing extracts from the three novels mentioned earlier in connection with psychoanalyst and patient, he remarks that "the narrators of these novels (and their most advanced characters, as we read through) seem to occupy no recognisable cultural environment at all" (p.8). If the novel traditionally involves degrees of dislocation between self and society, before this century one finds "higher purposes" and "communal ends" making their palpable mark (p.11). Bellamy cites Austen's Mansfield Park as one example among others; most of George Eliot's work would also serve. But by contrast,

> The measure of the heresy of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy in this respect is that the values inherent in the universes their characters attempt to synthesise are only those which tend *directly* to ensure the well-being of the self. Their heroes and heroines find "communality" not in culture, but in a neo-Vitalist process beyond culture. (p.11)

While Bennett and Galsworthy are outside the scope of this discussion, Bellamy's position regarding Wells will be sampled in order to establish paradigms against which to set Mitchell's comparable though different explorations of metacultural Vitalism.

High culture is largely irrelevant in a number of Wells's novels, such as The Time Machine, The Invisible Man, or The War in the Air. It is, however, very much present in Kipps. The ex-draper's assistant Artie Kipps comes into a fortune without warning and wonders how best to prepare himself for the level of society towards which his material wealth propels him. He seeks help in a quest to speak properly and to appreciate the right things from the well-meaning Helen Walsingham and the loathsome snob Chester Coote; he longs to appropriate the necessary "recondite knowledge and the occult and jealously guarded tips and secrets that constitute Art and the Higher Life",[12] having, among many other hardships, to wade contextless through Sesame and Lilies. After a revolt against an experience of accumulating pretentiousness, Kipps and his re-found childhood sweetheart Ann start planning a house: "We'll just 'ave a sensible 'ouse, and sensible things; no art or anything of that sort, nothing stuck up or anything, but just sensible."[13] Full narratorial agreement with such a resolution is not implied; Ann goes on to proclaim "No Socialism". Artie agrees out loud, despite being a Socialist in his heart, and despite Wells's membership of the Fabian Society. The happy couple's words consist of affirmations of a particular way of life in which all pretensions, including activities tending towards the intellectual, are seen as inappropriate.

Artie's post-inheritance attempts to attain respectability and standing give way to a move beyond such aspirations. Over and above the matter of Literature and Art, the norms of the surrounding social gropu are flouted by the sudden breaking of the engagement with Helen Walsingham, and the bypassing of a whole set of smaller proprieties to do with books, polite language, and knives and forks. In his rebellion he does what John Cushnie, Ena Lyon, her friend, and her friend's fiancé will never

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[12] Kipps, p.62.

[13] Kipps, p.346.

succeed in doing in their equivalent attempted climb to cultural and linguistic respectability in Mitchell's Grey Granite. (See, for instance, the friend's fiancé's agonising about social class, p.172). Slaves to convention they are, and slaves they will remain. Kipps is no longer a slave to anything, apart from (possibly) his family, although their purposes are synonymous with his. Of the contented final scene in which Kipps ponders the "purposeless, inconsecutive beauty" of life,[14] Bellamy comments:

> It is the harmony of the post-cultural self in intimate, mutually realizing relations with another self, the harmony of "cosmic" existence. Such a harmony is available to Kipps only after he has found it possible to give up all "cultural" pretensions, only after he and his family have established an intensely private bridge-head beyond culture. (p.132)

In some ways similar to Kipps, in his lowly origins and fumblings in the direction of artiness, Mr Polly's struggles for self-validation are of a more savage nature, involving arson, an attempt at suicide, and finally the great campaign against Uncle Jim in the fight for territorial dominance at the Potwell inn, which becomes

> a Darwinian fight for survival between cultural and post-cultural man. Polly wins because he is not limited to any kind of "savage" culture; he ignores Uncle Jim's protestations that ducking him in the water "ain't fair fightin". Polly's privatism is well adapted to "the private war". (p.142)

Tono-Bungay's George Ponderevo, even less fettered by the ties that bind, kills a man by shooting him in the back on his disastrous island expedition. Not only this, but he blithely informs us of this many pages and years ahead of schedule. But then, who is he scared of shocking? No one. Most people have a class and place and character, George informs us, but there is also to be experienced

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14 Kipps, p.424.

> another kind of life that is not so much living as a miscellaneous tasting of life. One gets hit by some unusual transverse force, one is jerked out of one's stratum and lives crosswise for the rest of the time, and, as it were, in a succession of samples. That has been my lot, and that is what has set me at last writing something in the nature of a novel. I have got an unusal series of impressions that I want very urgently to tell. I have seen life at very different levels, and at all these levels I have seen it with a sort of intimacy and in good faith. I have been a native in many social countries [. . .]. [15]

Tono-Bungay, with its freewheeling, entrepreneurial, scientifically- educated, class-crossing narrator who adapts and changes rather faster than Edwardian England does, is Bellamy's showcase, perhaps the best example of Bellamy's assertion that Wells, Galsworthy and Bennett move towards the

> position where salvation derives not just from adjustment to a modified culture, but from an analytic, ateleological mode of life which operates "beyond culture". They move towards a mode perhaps implicit in some of the difficult passages at the end of Tono-Bungay: "I have come to see myself from the outside, my country from the outside -- without illusions. We make and pass." (Bellamy, pp. 12-13.)

(It should be noted here that Mitchell uses the words immediately following Wells's "We make and pass" and concluding the novel as the opening quotation for his The Thirteenth Disciple, in reference to another restless traveller, Malcom Maudslay: "We are all things that make and pass, striving upon a hidden mission, out to the open sea.")[16]

Wells's scientific romances The Time Machine and The Invisible Man are also used to bear out the points in Bellamy's argument discussed above; surprisingly, The Food of the Gods is passed over without comment. This may be because the last- mentioned

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[15] Tono-Bungay, pp.3-4.

[16] Tono-Bungay, p.493.

is the hardest to take seriously, with its forty-foot toddlers stomping over England, as opposed to the deadpan social and evolutionary fantasy of The Time Machine and the sombre one-element nature of The Invisible Man. The forty-footers, though, are without doubt beyond culture, with fundamentally different needs, understandings, and values to the rest of humanity. And if Wells begins by treating them as freaks, by the end we have enjoyed extensive access to their own point of view. A number of different symbolic readings might be made: they may represent in very general terms the ambiguities implied in scientific innovation; they may represent the young in 1904, powerful or soon to be so, unforgiving and impatient with the incompetence and mediocrity of previous generations.

The novel ends with Cossar, their leader, standing tall and Titan-like, addressing his giant brothers and pointing to the heavens:

> His voice ceased. The white glare of one of the searchlights wheeled about, and for a moment fell upon him, standing out gigantic with hand upraised against the sky.
> For one instant he shone, looking up fearlessly into the starry deeps, mail-clad, young and strong, resolute and still. Then the light had passed and he was no more than a great black outline against the starry sky --, a great black outline that threatened with one mighty gesture the firmament of heaven and all its multitude of stars.[17]

The Food of the Gods differs from Wells's other novels mentioned above in that a supra-culture is involved, that of all the giants, rather than an individual moving beyond culture; it might be said that they move collectively beyond the culture so useless to them. Nevertheless, it is one individual who symbolises the movement, as Spartacus and Ewan do in the revolutionary fiction of Mitchell, who has as many problems as Wells when depicting leaders embodying the collective will.

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[17] Wells, The Food of the Gods, pp.316-17.

3 Leslie Mitchell Doing Likewise

Derivation from Wells in The Food of the Gods suggests itself strongly in this passage from near the end of Spartacus:

> Crowning the ridge was a still, watchful figure on horseback, helmeted in gold, armoured, immense in the spreading glow of the mist, the sun suddenly upon him. So he gleamed like a god, gigantic, and the legions stared and murmured as they looked at the terrible figure, for there was terror in it. In those mountain changes of the air they could see his face, immense and near, bearded and calm, high-browed under the helmet rim, his eyes cold and staring upon them, yet filled with a glow like the eyes of a snake. And to the praetor Manlius, it seemed he saw more than the strategos Spartacus, he saw THE SLAVE himself.
> Then that fancy passed, the last wisps of mist went quickly, the figure faded: and Manlius was aware of the slave army already in possession of the peaks of the pass. (p.128)

If it seems arbitrary to link the two passages above, one must consider the overt reference to Wells's big men in Mitchell's Stained Radiance. At the close of this novel, Thea Garland looks at her husband, John, just after they have decided to join the Anarcho-Communist party in order to fight against a system which saw her kicked out of her lodgings despite being in the late stages of pregnancy. John surveys London with an air of purpose; she asks herself what he reminds her of:

> He sat with his elbow upon his knees, his chin rested upon his fist. A crouched, strong figure reminding her of someone she'd once read about . . . who was that? Oh, the giant in The Food of the Gods who sat one afternoon and surveyed all London. (p.283)

This reference is possibly more subtle than one might imagine, as the giant who surveys London one afternoon is not heroic Cossar, but poor Caddles, who stares in bewilderment at the advertisement hoardings before being shot needlessly following an initially minor dispute. On the other hand, it may be Thea or Mitchell who misremembers, and in fact wishes Garland to resemble Cossar. Garland, then,

becomes a powerful, giant figure, and in this way replaces his predecessor Storman as party strongman. Storman, Garland, Spartacus, Ewan: Mitchell's fondness of big strong men can be ascribed to a number of influences. It derives partly from general Communist agitprop or from the Scottish legends of William Wallace or, more recently, John MacLean.

It might be pointed out that Garland and others are supposed to be spokesman for a race of dispossessed rather than individuals finding salvation in personal neo-Vitalism. William Bellamy is insistent on the distinctiveness of his favoured brand of Edwardian fiction which would separate it from Stained Radiance and The Food of the Gods: "The answer implicit in the Edwardian revolution is not cultural revolution but of moving beyond culture." (p.16) Sometimes, though, the edges may become blurred, as with Spartacus' slave army, who do not know themselves whether to be countercultural or postcultural, to conquer Rome or flee Italy. And in Stained Radiance, Garland is a cynic who has been comfortable nowhere and has survived everywhere, who pleases his army friends with coarse humour despite his basic contempt for "the proletarirats" who "smell bad" every morning (p.70). He smokes in a no-smoking cubicle, and tells various unfortunates to "Go to hell"; a rich lady who asks him to help her with her car, a fellow-soldier, a Cairene dragoman (pp.24,243,188). These are acts not merely of bloodymindedness, but of a disengagement from society, marked by the narrator in an opening description:

> [Garland] watched the passing pageant of life with ironic humour, yet constantly found himself plunging into that pageant, grabbing a banner, insisting on joining in the song. And sooner or later, because he was singing out of tune, because he saw the ludicrousness of the banner and his fellow-marchers, he deserted. He returned to the pavement to stand agaze, speculating on the lives of the processionists, their lives, their indecencies. (p.25)

The idea later on, of course, is that Garland has been converted from such aloofness to passionate commitment. There is no reason to doubt his eventual conversion; only a

qualification to be made that for bulk of the book the narrator's apartness and cynicism have been the dominant note.

Ewan in Grey Granite is a strange mixture of engagement and disengagement. Early on he denies the relevance of his parents' occupations for his own life: "Just that though my father was a ploughman and you came from a kitchen -- that's nothing to do with me, has it? I'm neither you nor my father: I'm myself." (p.26) One also recalls his lack of interest in his father's background in conversation with Old Leslie when younger (CH, p.117). He is disgusted by keelie habits and habitats for a time, but after a demonstration, and during a walk in museum which strikes him with its lack of people's history, Ewan does identify with the people, believing that "'twas yourself that history had tortured, trodden on, spat on." (p.76) Ellen affirms such an identification while worrying about her own relative failure:

> But as always with the working people everywhere, however she dreamed of justice for them, flamed in anger against their wrongs, something like a wall of glass came down cutting her off from their real beliefs, the meanings in tones and intonation, the secret that made them bearable as individuals. But Ewan now had the soapbox trick of pretending to be all things to all kinds of keelies -- That was damn mean and it wasn't true, there was no pretence, he WAS all things -- sometimes, frighteningly, it seemed to her that he was the keelies, all of them, himself. (p.192)

Ewan also thinks of himself as embodying all of the oppressed; "[It was] as though 'twas yourself that history had tortured"; "he was one with them all, long wail of sobbing mouths and wrung flesh." (pp.73,137) Real keelies, of course, would be less likely to be all things to all kinds of men. Valentine Cunningham comments on this issue. Alick West, a prominent member of the Left Review team, is quoted as an example of the confusion felt in the thirties by bourgeois writers who wished, at least rhetorically, to merge themselves with the mass of ordinary people, but knew that they were inescapably different: "There is a desire to feel, think and say 'we' instead of 'I';

but who are the 'we'? Bourgeoisie or workers?".[18] The left would have wanted to follow the formulaic prescription of the Communist Manifesto:

> Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour [. . .] a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class that holds the future in its hands. [The particular people concerned at the present moment are] a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.[19]

Given that Marxists believe in social class determining identity and action, though, what magic is on hand to help the bourgeois go over in meaningful and comprehensive terms? Even without the disadvantages of public school or Oxbridge, Ewan is not made a keelie by his Marxism, his rough hands, his old frayed suit or his shiny collar. He is superior and strange, just as Spartacus, the leader who enters his followers' "hearts and thoughts" and becomes one with "the dispossessed" (p.124) is in his servant Mella's eyes "without doubt" "a God" (p.203). Christopher Caudwell's remarks in Illusion and Reality might constitute the beginnings of a defence of Spartacus' or Ewan's great man status from a Marxist position: "The great man is not just an individuality but an individuality given a collective embodiment and significance".[20] But as far as Grey Granite goes, the Duncairn keelies, who would in Caudwell's scheme presumably give Ewan significance, are not Marx's proletarian vanguard, as Trease is unembarrassed to point out to Ewan: "For it's me and you are the working class, not the poor Bulgars gone back to Gowans." (p.147) And later, "THEY THEMSELVES WERE THE WORKERS" (p.181).

James Barke among others was to regret that Ewan could "not experience deep love

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18 Cunningham, p.214.

19 Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto in Karl Marx: A Reader, p.233.

20 Christopher Caudwell, Illusion and Reality (London, 1937), p.333.

for the working class".[21] This puts it mildly. If in Wells Arthur Kipps' private bridgehead consists of cosy, apolitical domesticity -- in contrast to Ewan's and Jim Trease's lives of endless trouble and violence -- there are strange similarities. These two and the Kipps family have reached the stage of ideological self-sufficiency, of not wishing to rely on anyone else's judgement. Ewan and Big Jim trust neither the authorities, nor the middle classes, nor the industrial workers, nor Selden types in the party itself who employ "yeasty sentiment and blah about Justice" (p.191) and thus disqualify themselves from serious co-operation with the forces of history. There is no obstacle to lying about the Gowans explosion; anyone who objects must be a spineless liberal. Jim and Ewan can make up their own values. Their philosophy borders on the Nietzschean. "The leaders of the herd", as Nietzsche puts it, "require a fundamentally different valuation for their actions"; "all great men have been criminals".[22]

Ewan's outlook is in a sense predicated on the Marxian contempt for bourgeois morality and belief in the dictatorship of the proletariat,[23] which bears comparison with Nietzsche's principle of the *Übermensch* trampling on everyone else. In terms of representation in fiction, however, writers such as Gorky in Mother have tried to portray progressive workers' agitation without using Mitchell's mode of representing a Communist aristocracy that lies, cheats, and despises everyone else.[24] (This is, in a

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21 James Barke, letter to Helen Cruickshank 12.11.34. quoted in Zagratzki, p.51; in Ian Munro Archive, Gen.2188, EUL.

22 Nietzsche, The Will to Power, vol.1 (London, 1909), pp.237,195.

23 See Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme", (written 1875, first published 1891) in Karl Marx: A Reader, pp.291-94. Universal suffrage is basically ridiculed and the phrase "revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat" can only mean a tiny minority of the self-chosen in charge.

24 Maxim Gorky, Mother (Moscow, 1954). First published, 1900. The precise degree of Mitchell's support for Ewan's brand of Communism can never be satisfactorily settled, due to the degree of interest he shows in the inner lives of Ewan and Ellen and Chris. Each interprets the world quite differently; none is given clear ideological ascendancy.

sense, to Mitchell's advantage rather than Gorky's).

The individual neo-Vitalism to be found in Wells is one influence on Mitchell's treatment of Ewan and John Garland, despite the extent of the ideological differences between the two writers. Mitchell's treatment of other protagonists is, however, rather closer to the Wellsian "Neo-Vitalist" existence "beyond culture". His two autobiographical archaeologists, Malcom Maudslay and Gershom Jezreel, in The Thirteenth Disciple and Image and Superscription respectively, travel freely, show continual restlessness, and attach themselves to no political cause for any great length of time. Malcom has a peasant upbringing in Leekan, which is based to some extent on Mitchell's own Arbuthnott, leaves school early to become a Glasgow journalist, and attempts suicide when caught embezzling newspaper funds for the Communists and when his lover has apparently died. He goes to war in France, comes back to find uncertain employment prospects, and after a number of dead-end jobs works for The Hanno Society, a body dedicated to exploration and archaeological research. He helps found a quasi-anarchist group of political activists referred to three-quarters-seriously as "The New Satanists" (Chapter title, p.240) and tries to organise "all the constructive immorality that's going around" (p.240). Before marrying one of the group, he resigns due to its stance against acts of pacifist sabotage in the event of Britain going to war, and ends up on a quest to add weight to Diffusionist theory and to find the Lost City of the Sun in Central America, unfortunately injuring himself and dying on the way. Malcom has lived life, in George Ponderevo's phrase, "in a succession of samples", and in the course of writing most of his own biography, has come to see himself and society "from the outside".

The same may be said of Image and Superscription's Gershom Jezreel, who after boyhood in Kent experiences archaeology in Central America, good society in New York, war in France, and then a mixture of nudism and farming in the U.S.A.'s Midwest. Clocking up the joint record in Mitchell's novels (shared with Chris Guthrie)

of four sexual partners, he continues his most meaningful relationship beyond the story's end, powering into the future away from Midwest redneck fascism alongside his scantily-clad lover Ester on an amply-fuelled high-performance motorbike. Titillating though this may be, comments Michael McGrath, the novel's climactic vision does no kind of justice at all to the socio-political questions that have been raised during its course.[25] This is undoubtedly true, but it is perhaps beside the point. The vital individual's self-salvation is the novel's final concern.

As far as we know, the motorbike saga is not autobiographical. Yet many elements of these two books are: crofting beginnings, journalism in Glasgow, overseas army service (though not in the first world war), fascination with archaeology and its kindred disciplines. Alongside his fictional creations Malcom and Gershom, Mitchell believes in Diffusionism; such a creed, despite its ultimately egalitarian premises, puts Mitchell and his surrogates in danger of despising others: if the key truth about human history is only subscribed to in the thirties by three anthropologists or so, a multitude of ignoramuses remains, whose false consciousness and lack of understanding of the evils of "civilisation" firmly implicates them in civilisation's crimes. Much of Mitchell's life, then, has its own potential for analysis as "beyond culture".

This discussion has so far avoided Mitchell's most famous character, Chris Guthrie/ Tavendale/ Colquohoun/ Ogilvie. Not so autobiographically based as Ewan or Malcom are, and less easily fitted into Bellamy's categories, Chris's consolidation of self and de-cultured existence must nevertheless be given some consideration. Originally inured to a crofting life in which genuine community spirit has flourished (despite the divisions) at certain occasions such as New Year, harvest, or a wedding, she is whisked into a manse as the Rev. Colquohoun's wife at the end of Sunset Song. Having jumped classes, she lives a semi-reclusive existence in Cloud Howe,

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[25] McGrath, p.250.

sympathetic to the idea of the rights of working people as set against the nascent fascism of Laird Mowat, but enjoying no real contact with Segget's dispossessed, the spinners. Under fire from snobs and inverted snobs, and sceptical of her husband's impassioned convictions, she maintains a staunch independence of self, as suggested in the "Scotland" chapter. When Colquohoun goes off to deliver his final apocalyptic message to the folk, giving the kirk priority over Chris ("It's you or the kirk, Chris, and I'm the kirk's man") she "smiled, white" (p.206) and negotiates the next harrowing hour with grim competence as he coughs blood onto the pulpit and dies.

The move to Duncairn with Ewan uproots her even further, although she maintains her original class identity against the verbal abuse of a keelie: "My class? It was digging its living in sweat while yours lay down with a whine in the dirt." (GG, p.29) Unfortunately, such a class has effectively disappeared, Colquohoun having conducted its funeral at the standing stones in 1919. Chris, then, sees herself de-cultured in the apparent near-anarchy of city life. As the trilogy's final novel progresses she tries to take stock of what she has, friends and a son, yet realises that ultimately she has "NOTHING AT ALL" and remembers the Quair's refrain that "nothing endured". The passage continues:

> And so she covered her face and sat down and so stayed there awhile and then put on her clothes, coldly, mechanically, looking at the clock . . . . Trudging in the track of those little feet as a tethered beast that went round and round the tethering post in the midst of a park -- (p.104)

Chris's trudge is a far cry from the "neo-Vitalism" Bellamy claims for Wells's, Bennett's and Galsworthy's characters. It is relevant, however, to his discussion of the implied, basic "post- Darwinian" question in the Edwardians: "Where is [life] all leading?" from which the (non-) answer emerges: "The important thing is to keep going" (Bellamy, p.20). If Chris dies, or merges with the land, at the premature age of less than forty, she has stayed the course for three disaster-ridden Mitchell novels,

which is no mean achievement.

One must simply keep going, because history does not admit more optimistic possibilities. Bellamy sets the 1890s novel against its Mid-Victorian parent thus:

> The cultural milieu which partly derived from the sense of an uncontrollable and imminent ending for European culture could hardly be expected to result in extended novelistic "histories" in which plot is designed specifically to control the movement towards an ending designed to be emotionally satisfying. A long and well-constructed novel surely represents, in the cultural matrix from which it emerges, the ability to control time, to define a sense of "where it is all going to end". Such a confidence in the face of the future was unthinkable for the English writers of the 1890s. (p.33)

This has to refer to Wells in particular who, as we have seen in the "Civilisation" chapter, speculates and worries compulsively about crisis, disaster and change with an intensity that Galsworthy and Bennett do not show. The 1890s as seen by Bellamy may be seen to parallel in some ways the 1930s as seen by Mitchell, the latter being equally or more full of apocalyptic foreboding. To return to Chris and her continued journey, though: there is more to be said about Bellamy's interest in characters running their lives as projects or characters simply keeping going without having an apparent ultimate goal of any kind, and about how, in the Quair and other Mitchell novels, strong figures let their attachments fall away.

4 Lack, Desire, Fulfilment

The introduction to this chapter referred in passing to the Lacanian theory of the psychic fragmentation inevitable when the child separates itself from everything else and becomes apparently an individual in its own right. Involved in this is the idea of lack: the human subject always feels that there is something missing, something taken away, as soon as it has defined its boundaries by labelling itself "I". Lack generates a

desire to be re-integrated into a greater sense of fullness and completeness.[26] This desire manifests itself in sexual form -- among others.

Lacanian theory has been briefly used on Chris Guthrie by Deirdre Burton, who writes of the "split self" of Chris and her interesting relation to her own body.[27] Having started, though, Burton might have taken Lacan further and analysed Chris's relation to "lack" in the Quair.[28] Granted, Chris has her moments of lack and desire, especially in Sunset Song. She waits for a lover who would some day come and kiss her" (p.71) and, sure enough, a youthful love for Ewan Tavendale, up to a point conventional, comes along. A severe degree of estrangement takes place when he brutalises and rapes her when home on leave from army training; when, however, she learns of his suicidal attempt to get back to her and consequent death she goes to the Standing Stones with young Ewan and sees his ghost, which "went into the heart that was his forever" (p.241). More consistent than her love for Ewan, though, has been her love for the land, as expressed by her mother Jean "the countryside your own, you its" (p.27); and by herself:

> The land was forever, you were close to it and it to you, not at a bleak remove it held you and hurted you. And she had thought to leave it all! (p.119)

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[26] see Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (Oxford, 1983), p.167 for one summary of Lacanian theory ; in his version the emphasis on lack falls on the (male) individual after the trauma of the Oedipus complex; access to the mother's body is then denied. Madan Sarup in Lacan (Hemel Hempstead, 1992, p.98) sees lack as beginning with birth and culminating in the mirror stage, when the child first sees itself as an integrated thing, set apart.

[27] Deirdre Burton, "A Feminist Reading of Lewis Grassic Gibbon's A Scots Quair", in Jeremy Hawthorn (ed), The Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century (London, 1984), pp.34-46 (36-38), covering (i) the "two Chrisses"; (ii) Chris's body parts taking grammatical functions in their own right; (iii) the body parts being objects of her gaze; (iv) Chris's whole body being imaged in a mirror.

[28] I am indebted for this line of enquiry to Yuko Matsui, former research student at Edinburgh University.

Ewan having gone into her heart, she can get on with life, but can only give her next man Colquohoun "maybe the second Chris, maybe the third" (SS, p.253) and their marriage is a mixture of affection and pragmatic alliance. She aches for young Ewan her child in Cloud Howe: Segget's snobs disapprove of his cavalier manners and she realises the impossibility of them understanding "The things that bound you to Ewan, as if his birth-cord still held you together" (CH, p.103). Most powerfully of all, though, she is held in a basically static relationship with nature which ensures a measure of detachment from feelings toward people or ideas:

> Chris was tired, but her mind made up. Not even for Robert could she change and pretend, though she'd not say a thing that could hurt, could she help. She had found in the moors and the sun and the sea her surety unshaken, lost maybe herself, but she followed no cloud, be it named or unnamed. (p.173)

Grey Granite accentuates her coldness and apartness. Experiences in Duncairn with the boarding-house, with Ewan's devotion to Communism, with (possibly) mid-life crisis confirm her as "unhurtable now" (GG, p.165); Ake Ogilvie marries her thinking the "glimmer in her eyes a fire that he himself could blow to a flame" but realising that "instead 'twas no more than the shine of a stone" (p.190) She kisses Archie Clearmont goodbye, "and thought, nice boy, and [forgot] him." (p.200) Before marriage with Ake she decides she "had finished with men forever, and could never again stir to a semblance of life that something that had died when Robert died." (p.131) This resolution, after its hairline fracture with the advent of Ake, is confirmed after the first night: "never again might any man make in gladness unquiet a heart passed beyond lust and love alike -- past as a child forgetting its toys" (p.163); and is fleshed out further a little later:

> She'd finished with men or the need for them, no more that gate might open in her heart, in her body and soul, in welcome and gladness to any man. Quick and quick in the flying

> months she passed with hasting feet over ways that once had seemed ever-lasting: the need not only for a lover's caresses, but the need for anyone's liking, for care, kind words, safe eyes . . . . That dreadful storm she'd once visioned stripping her bare was all about her, and she feared it no longer, eager to be naked, alone and unfriended, facing the last realities with a cool, clear wonder, an unhasting desire. (p.189)

Desire for what? one wonders. Desire for death? It would appear that way, judging by her merging with the landscape at the conclusion. William Malcolm's remarks on the earth as a giant ecological recycling plant are interesting but do not reflect Chris's thoughts.[29] She cares little about the environment or the future of her progeny or that of others; she cares about an achieved personal integration and untroubled completeness, about not needing other people.

Psychic lack also appears in William Bellamy's book when it explores the philosophical context for Wells and the others. The lack there crops up not with reference to Lacan but to the post-nineteenth century loss of the assurance of divine providence. He quotes J. Hillis Miller on the death of God creating "an unassuageable hunger for some plenitude of being" (Bellamy, p. 25). God does not loom large in the orthodox sense in Mitchell; admittedly in Cloud Howe there is "something lacking or something added" that is perhaps God and perhaps not (p.52) and we learn that the fight that never stops at the end of Grey Granite is that between "FREEDOM and GOD" (p.202). Mitchell's objects of devotion and worship concern various abstract conceptions: abstracts which, like God, would involve sublimated sex in a vulgar Freudian interpretation. Chris is right about Ewan when she suggests "I don't think he'll ever be any lass's lad." (p.151) because Ewan only really wants to have sex with History, to live History, to be History. He may occasionally hug and cry in his youth (see CH, pp.149,154) and is briefly Ellen's lover, but he conceptualises his very attachment to her in terms of what "stags" get up to at "rutting time" (GG, p.93). "I

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[29] Malcolm, book, p.184.

have a normal male biology", he seems to be saying, "but what does that matter?" He has "the kind of smile no lad ever kept for his lass" (p.159), and appears "cold, blank and grey", with "horrible eyes like a cuttle-fish . . . [with] the glint of grey granite." (p.169). When Ellen plays with a baby he looks at them "cool and frank, amused and a little bored." (p.177) Ewan seems unlikely to be material for a loving father.

Mitchell's other heroes have slightly more sensual passion. In the case of Malcom Maudslay and Gershom Jezreel, sexual partners are in evidence and are genuinely loved: they are subordinate, though, to desires for the intangible. Malcom in The Thirteenth Disciple desires simultaneously the confirmation of Diffusionist history and (like Tennyson's Ulysses and the great men in Nine Against the Unknown) the continual pushing back of the horizon, as does much-travelled Gershom Jezreel.

If one were to select a Mitchell novel epitomising desire craving fulfilment, though, it would probably be Spartacus: there is a poem about a profound desire to return home by page seven; the slave leader yearns for the recovery of his identity ("Who am I? I can't remember!" -- Sp, p.31); the slaves in the slave-army are enchanted sensually with the literal fruits of conquest available to them in Italy -- "crushing the grapes on their lips with a strange, tender ecstasy" p.163)-- and the reader is encouraged to lust after the temples, trees, villas and hills of Rome even as the slaves flee it (p.139). They search, permanently deracinated, for fulfilment within the makeshift army society, though remembering some elements of their former lives:

> Half at least were born in slavery, men of the fields and plantations and households, with uncertain gods and rules and beliefs, fear for an urge by day, exhaustion their urge by night, uncertain their fathers, but glimpsing their mothers, mating a matter of stealth and chance [. . .]. Yet even so, aliens to their own lost lands, they remembered dimly their rules and creeds. (p.25)

All this having been said about lack and desire in the novel, however, we see the action of Spartacus through the eyes of the eunuch Kleon, almost continuously cold,

cerebral and detached. He is introduced to us as having "no faith in the Gods" and being unable to know any "pleasure in women" (p.3). The lack of sexuality and lack of emotion become in effect the same thing. He finds it difficult to weep about anything, difficult to feel hunger (pp.14,16) and difficult to identify with anybody. Asked at an army council about what to do next, he can reply "I . . . am for nothing" (p.25). His abstract intellectual attachment to Plato's Republic, which he constantly carries around with him, means more than any human relationship. He does have one love affair, brief but admittedly tender, with the ex-slave Puculla; the "frozen hate" that has long "girdled his heart" is supposed to vanish at the affair's conclusion, although the evidence for profound character change after this ("The Greek smiled that twisted smile once bitter"; p.195) is limited, just as the "cool" Ewan who was "apart and alone" emphatically does not vanish from Grey Granite after the dance-hall scene[30]. There *is* a fulfilment of a lack of some kind on the novel's final page, as Kleon achieves wholeness through brief mental recapitulation of the great incidents of the slave rebellion and then somehow anticipates, in a typical piece of Mitchell metaphysical foolhardiness, the crucifixion of Christ in the same cause. This said, Kleon's basic mode of being and interpreting is one of withdrawal and needing nothing, paralleling Chris and young Ewan among Mitchell's prominent characters.

5 Isolation; The Investigator

Often in Mitchell, then, alongside expressions of desire, of love, of the wish to push on to a horizon literal or political, is a wish to find main characters and author-surrogates who avoid the pain and commitment of desire: to stand, watch, and analyse, invulnerable to human hurt, whether just as an observer who won't join in, who

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[30] GG, p.106.

doesn't need other people, or as a pseudo-scientist. It is not that Mitchell necessarily backs and favours all of the utterances of, say, Ewan in Grey Granite or James Storman, the cold Communist observer of proletarians and Welshmen in Stained Radiance; it is that having these characters at hand he may use their consciousness when he wishes to dissect a character, group, or creed. In his book, William Bellamy discusses extracts from Tono-Bungay, The Old Wives' Tale, and A Man of Property -- each coming as explicatory introductions to the respective novels -- as being coldly analytical beyond the narrative norm. Ignoring, perhaps, George Eliot's laboratory-like analysis of Mrs Tulliver and her kind in The Mill on the Floss as various kinds of simple-minded animal,[31] he suggests as highly original the fact that

> the dichotomy between narrator and character-subjects is transformed here into something like the relation between a scientist and his experimental apparatus or, indeed, between a psychoanalyst and his patient. (p.6)

Bellamy's analogy is related to his emphasis on the novel and therapy, which does not immediately concern the argument here. What it is important to recall is the tone of scientific objectivity adopted so characteristic of Mitchell's vocabulary; his "investigator" in the essays in Scottish Scene parallels Wells's Mr Direck, investigator of the English scene, in Mr Britling Sees It Through.[32] Mitchell's investigator crops up three times: in "Glasgow", in "Aberdeen", and in "Religion". "Glasgow" sees the investigator disguised as a bourgeois and reading the Modern Scot, taking other such appropriate attributes as well; his identity thus remains a mystery (p.136). The fact that he is appalled at life in Govan (p.138) and relieved at Gorbals people reconfirming that races other than the Scots do exist (p.144) gives few further clues about him. In "Aberdeen" the investigator has a corresponding lack of interaction with the people,

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31 George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss (London, 1860)

32 Another of Wells's free-floating investigators would be the Inventor in The Time Machine.

unless you count taking a room, eating an Aberdonian high tea, or turning down a prostitute's proposition. In "Religion", the investigator appears momentarily to point a moral at the end of Mitchell's sorry tale after being "vexed from that humble impartiality which is his aim" by the Church of Scotland waxing lyrical in favour of war (p.321). Such investigations could be read as English anti-Scottish ones (and have been, up to a point, earlier on) but also might be taken as identity-less and mildly misanthropic.[33]

The identity-less existence is sought by Mitchell through his investigators and through his more mainstream fictional characters; identity is simultaneously lost and found by Chris in the land, by Ewan in History, by Kleon and Malcom Maudslay in death. The investigators never develop identities except as playful Mitchell-surrogates. When Cairns Craig writes of the narrator merging his identity with that of the folk in the Quair,[34] this is not necessarily out of self-abnegating love for the people. It is because Mitchell, in them but not of them, has avoided standing up to be identified. Intellectually obsessed with racial affairs, with the biological and cultural stuff that makes up humanity, given to off-the-cuff generalisations about races and cultures or speculations about the shapes of people's heads, Mitchell appears to want the rest of the world to be in a laboratory culture cell while he himself watches and feels superior.

Mitchell's isolated figures in the fiction may be partially explained in terms of anarchism; they are their own masters/ mistresses; no-one has a right to tell any of them

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[33] If Englishness supplies noticeable identity in the Quair, with the ScSc investigator Englishness and identitylessness are not too far apart; his origins and destination are unspecified, but we guess he will end up back in England. One could think too of Mitchell's Anglicised accent (see Scotland chapter): this is adopted not, he claims, make others think he is English, but to facilitate conversation with "cultured people". Which cultured people: any cultured people? English cultured people? Or do "any" and "English" mean the same thing?

[34] Cairns Craig, "Character, Community and the Scottish Imagination".

what to do. Such an approach dominates Zagratzki's readings and has much in its favour, although it would be more challenging to describe Wells's equivalent characters as anarchistic. If the scientific rhetoric in particular convicts Mitchell of egotism, there are ways in which he could be defended. One could see his willed isolation as a clumsy attempt to pursue relatively disinterested and unaffiliated thought; one could cite literary precedent by contextualising it in terms of the Romantic Image as explored by Frank Kermode (the image, originating in his account from the early nineteenth century that places the artist in necessary isolation due to the special nature of his vision) or by comparing Stephen's stance on "dramatic form" in Joyce's Portrait of the Artist where he sites the artist "within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails".[35] Such ideas as these, though, conflict with his strong protestations in something like "Glasgow" about art as any kind of unique preserve of holiness (ScSc, p.141) but the tropes of creative and analytical isolation in which Mitchell moves are more powerful than he might admit.

Conclusion

The first chapter of this thesis discussed Mitchell's complex relationship with several aspects of what he labelled "Civilisation", beginning with his understanding of how it initially came about with the development of agriculture and religion, and moving on to discuss his apocalyptic fears for Western society, his view of civilisation's sciences and his wishes for civilisation's records to be both destroyed and preserved. Mitchell hates civilisation and the bulk of high culture: culture in Bellamy's terms he should not necessarily despise, given that the hunter societies of Three Go Back and Gay Hunter

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[35] Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (London, 1957), p.162 and passim;
James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (London, 1952), p.219. First published, 1916.

have cultures by definition. Elsewhere, nevertheless, his vital neo-Wellsian heroes often try to flee both civilisation and culture.

There is little that they can do about the original establishment of civilisation; Gay Hunter and Three Go Back aside, there is no way back to primal innocence.There is also little they can do to avoid apocalypse if it comes. Exceptionally, Chris transcends it by merging into the eternal Land; more typically, George Ponderevo's ride into the future on the wings of the storm, or, more exactly, on the warship X2[36] is counterpointed by Ewan's hunger march down to London in pursuit of history-making confrontation and Gershom Jezreel's concluding motorbike ride through the Mid-West's wide-open spaces that is bound to find confrontation and violence somewhere.

Mitchell's investigator figures do their social science in Scotland anonymously; his named characters react to their civilisation's sciences by trying to be judicious and trying to push their disciplines in new directions. Various approved, individualistic scientists such as seismologist Richard Southcote lurk in the Cairo short stories;[37] Ewan, Gershom and Malcom all make contributions to science by investigating the truths of archaeology. For these three, pursuing science means leaving the ordinary world: Ewan isolates himself from emotional contact with others and looks at his flints: the other two do what Mitchell pretended he did, and go to the Central American jungle. Civilisation's monuments are to be respected and kept in touch with by Chris if they consist of Covenanters' graves or the standing stones: they are to be utterly scorned by Ewan if they are the Duncairn Museum collection. It is significant that the Museum is a public place for the masses to crowd into, while Chris's stone monuments involve lonely, private experience. She is in touch with culture of a kind, but not the culture Ewan rejects. If there is no ultimate escape from civilisation and

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36 See Tono-Bungay, pp.484-93.

37 See Mitchell, "For Ten's Sake", in CC, pp.13-33; for heroic scientists in the same volume see also "A Volcano in the Moon", pp.109-30 and "It is written", pp.239-60.

culture except by death or time travel, and all one can do is make moves and gestures in the direction of escape, Mitchell's moves are often substantial ones.

Conclusion

My first chapter has no particularly large quarrel with previous critics, preparing the ground as it does for later chapters and noting Mitchell's wish to change civilisation, to rewrite history and to erect monuments to elements of the Scottish past. By contrast, the Scotland and England chapters, assessing Mitchell's perceptions of national identity in a detailed way, contend more controversially that for him not only do Scottish icons need toppling, but that the Scottish land is dead and the Scottish city unbearable. England, however, is still alive and just about bearable, and has certain traditions and a spirit that are much healthier than its northern counterpart. Furthermore, the rest of the world is a place still to be romantically explored by Westerners, despite the sins of generations of colonialists, and still to be provocatively insulted by glib writers, despite the obvious threat of racism in the thirties to basic justice and world peace. The Orient, though, is something that Mitchell does try to approach on its own terms rather than Orientalist ones at times. He does not always succeed.

Such interests as these are part of a larger concern, derived very much from his reading in Wells, on the future well-being and progress of the human race in general. Mitchell is emphatic in his denunciation of the human male as rapacious beast and expresses a desire for more equitable gender relations; alongside these pieces of professional righteousness he manages to spice up numerous scenes with more sadism, masochism, and fetishism than has previously been noted. The sexual sensationalism relates in its hack quality to the science fiction sensationalism in works like Stained Radiance. Alongside this interest in the human race(s) and its (their) future, some of Mitchell's most noticeable characters and personae are quite determined to cut themselves off from the lives and affairs of the mass.

In terms of the future of Grassic Gibbon/ Mitchell studies, my thesis implies the necessity for continued critical scrutiny of

(i) his too-easily assumed through-and-through Scottishness (e.g. in the Lewis Grassic Gibbon Centre, Arbuthnott)

(ii) his human decency, warmth and wholesomeness (e.g. in critics such as Douglas Young)

(iii) his strong sense of involvement in all struggles against oppression (e.g. in Uwe Zagratzki).

Though some of these thematic explorations have involved charging Mitchell with a covert or overt racism or elitism, this thesis is not out to indict him for especially reactionary attitudes; rather, he is a case study worth investigating given his much-protested cosmopolitan and egalitarian ideals. Neither does this mean necessarily that he is a bad writer overall, though his racial polemic can be woefully uninspired. This does not detract from the genius of the Quair, Spartacus or The Speak of the Mearns -- this thesis has not made as its first priority the proof of literary merit as such. It has pointed incidentally to the Quair's merit by underlining something of the multiplicity of interpretations possible of Chris Guthrie/ Tavendale/ Colquohoun/ Ogilvie/ Caledonia (e.g. shown in previous chapters to be simultaneously the symbol of Scotland and rejector of Scotland, the symbol of everywoman, rejector of the world, and rejector of desire).

Mitchell's bad writing, though, demands critical attention. It is often illuminating to place it in its literary context, as with, for instance, the praise of England in the Mitchell novels that relates in various ways to Wells' fiction. Another example is the speculation at the end of Three Go Back, where Clair Stranlay finds that her modern lover Keith is a kind of reincarnation of her ancient Cro-Magnon lover from the timewarp, Aerte. The consequent suggestion runs: "Race type, race-memory, blood of his blood. Who can know?" (p.247). Not Mitchell, perhaps, given his ambivalence on this subject; Stained Radiance ridicules Mrs Gayford when she wonders if she was "Aspasia in a previous incarnation" (p.211) -- although also wondering about male "race memories" conflicting with female ones (p.39). Edwin Muir and Neil Gunn are on hand for comparison as literary Scots interested in race-memory. Muir's Autobiography describes his parents as "allegorical figures in a timeless landscape" and this vision seems to be upheld. Witches, devils and fairies help Orcadians to link with their distant past, and our true selves

"extend far beyond any boundary we can set for ourselves in the past or the future."[1] In Neil Gunn's Highland River,Kenn wishes to explore

> into the source of his forebears back beyond the dawn of history. It was remarkable how the races that had gone into his making had each left their signature on the river bank [. . .]. And all these elements of race still existed along the banks of the river, not only visibly in the appearance of the folk themselves, but invisibly in the stones and the earth.[2]

There is more grace in the way Gunn and Muir give expression to their fantasies compared with the writing in Three Go Back; there is more grace in Mitchell himself when the ghosts of ancient men appear in the Quair and The Speak of the Mearns. For Douglas Gifford, "What is acceptable in a poetic supernatural tale is not so in a Wellsian and scientifically based argument".[3] If you emphasise the "poetic", then, you can get away with anything.Yet Three Go Back at least can be appreciated for being bold in its own silliness, making it plain that Mitchell hankers after the idea that human consciousness and culture can be transmitted over hundreds or thousands of years by information encoded in human genes. One could, like Francis Russell Hart, consider the climax of Three Go Back as part of a literary discussion of Mitchell's fondness for "archetypes"[4] or one could consider it as foregrounding what is suggested among other race-conscious Scottish contemporaries, who would include "Hugh MacDiarmid", with his made-up pseudo-Gaelic name.

Malcolm Chapman addresses the Grieve-MacDiarmid alteration and derides the "border Scot, born within a few miles of England".[5] The derision towards Grieve he sets in a larger context of Celticism, Gaelicism, Nationalism and Romanticism. Chapman lets the words of one of the more eccentric Scottish advocates of mystical links with the

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[1] Edwin Muir, An Autobiography (London, 1954), pp.24,13,48. An earlier version appeared under the title The Story and the Fable (London, 1940).

[2] Neil Gunn, Highland River (Edinburgh, 1991), p.52. First published 1937.

[3] Gifford, p.53.

[4] Francis Russell Hart, The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey (London, 1978), pp.230-31.

[5] Chapman, The Celts: The Construction of a Myth,p.92.

past and champions of Gaelic culture, J.L. Campbell, speak for themselves:

> On the one hand there is a community of independent personalities whose memories of men and events are often amazingly long (in the Gaelic-speaking Outer Hebrides they go back to Viking times a thousand years ago) and where there is an ever-present sense of the other world of spiritual and psychic experience; on the other hand there is a standardised world where people live in a mental jumble of newspaper headlines and BBC news bulletins, forgetting yesterday's as they read today's, worrying themselves about far-away events which they cannot possibly control, where memories are so short that men often do not know the names of their grandparents.[6]

What we have here in this passionate *wha's like us* manifesto is miles from the ordering historical imagination denigrated by Cairns Craig. It bears some comparison with the gesture which Craig praises Stevenson, Hogg, Scott and (by implication) Mitchell for making, the gesture towards space "out of history".[7] Neither is it far off from Roderick Watson's "Visions of Alba" idea, Alba being the alternative Platonic vision of Scottish life as it might be lived as seen in Gunn and Gibbon.[8] Campbell's stance might be best described, though, as sub-historical.The term is intended to cover a wide area: in their different ways Neil Gunn, Edwin Muir, and Leslie Mitchell all indulge in activity akin to Campbell's, where enormous elisions are made and liberties are taken in order to connect up events taking place ages apart in the pursuit of simplistic truths about the relationship between now and then. Sub-history is inevitable to some degree in historically aware imaginative literature; reading too much of it can irritate. Edwin Muir does not really have a lot in common with Norsemen; Gunn's Kenn is not really in touch with everything that has occurred in his strath; Mitchell's Chris does not really know what the Covenanters thought about their wars.

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6 Quoted in Chapman, The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture, p.133; originally in J.L. Campbell (ed.), Tales of Barra told by the Coddy (Edinburgh, 1960), p.24.

7 Cairns Craig, "Outside History", in Écosse: Regards d'Histoire, p.209-28.

8 Rory Watson, "Visions of Alba: The Construction of Gaelic Roots in Modern Scottish", in Écosse: Regards d'Histoire, pp.253-64 (259). On p.264 he equivocates on the idea's usefulness.

Mitchell's slapdash approach to history can be seen running through much of his work on England, Scotland and the rest of the world. In so many cases he knows better than it would appear, knows that affairs were not that simple, but whether in a desperate hack-writing hurry, whether to please readers looking for summaries or, conversely, to achieve *succés de scandale*, he presses on in cavalier mode. As we have seen, he does of course pour scorn on the fetishising of bits and pieces of history and culture, especially when it signifies disregard of the agonies of the present: "the Ancient Scots", says Tory Miss Murgatroyd after reading some Lewis Spence in Grey Granite, were "Awful Powerful in magic" (p.31); Chris' radio serves up the views of "Jacob P. Hackenschmidt on Scotland and her Ancient Nationhood". In the work of Leslie Mitchell, the representations and propositions should always be read with the satire in mind. This does not absolve him from all the corner-cutting on race, nationality, history and culture, but is one mitigating factor.

The general stance of Douglas Young and Uwe Zagratzki is that Mitchell's dubious history is also often mitigated by its being in a worthy cause. Even though his ideas of Diffusionism and the Golden Age are empirically wrong, they imply, there is a spiritual meaning present that we should take to our hearts in order to work for a saner world. Both would do better to admit more straightforwardly that Mitchell suffered under the influence of two naïve grand narratives in the thirties, rather than just the one that affected so many of his contemporaries. Mitchell's essays and novels do provoke readers to question their beliefs concerning history and culture, and to read in new directions; it is a pity that sometimes readers are sent to the wrong books.[9] The right books he sends readers to include those written by Wells. In amongst the unlikely claims and hectoring overstatement that one finds in Mitchell and his English mentor, common to both is the capacity for serious expression of a nostalgia for a national or regional identity as it dies, changes, or exists under palpable threat, alongside the acknowledgement of the inexorable nature of historical change.

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[9] Books by Diffusionists such as G. Elliot Smith, for instance.

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